

# EVALUATION AND DATA WORKGROUP REPORT

November 3, 2015

The Evaluation and Data Workgroup of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee reconvened in September 2015 to discuss program processes, review the state statute and previous recommendations, and develop a new set of recommendations for 2016. Workgroup members met in person on 9/2/15 and 10/6/15 and by phone on 10/28/15. Below is a summary of key findings from current program data and a new set of recommendations.

## CURRENT STATUS

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### Program Data

The Evaluation and Data workgroup was unable to obtain results from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) survey, DHHS's current primary method of evaluating program effectiveness. NYTD is administered to program participants upon enrollment and every 6 months after. Additionally, the workgroup was not provided with reasons for early discharges from the program, as required in Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4512. Below is a summary of data the workgroup was able to obtain, reflecting the last 10 months of implementation (December 2014 through September 2015):

- ★ The number of young adults in the program has consistently grown each month, from 96 in December 2014 to 146 in September 2015
- ★ An average of 10 young adults per month signed Voluntary Services and Support Agreements
- ★ Well over half were identified as female (64%)
- ★ The majority have resided in the ESA and NSA (56%), as opposed to the SESA, CSA, and WSA (44%)
- ★ The percentage of IV-E eligible young adults has fluctuated a bit month-to-month, with an overall average of 20% (21% in September were eligible)
- ★ 53 young adults have left the program since December: 26 "graduated" (turned 21), and 27 were terminated due to either loss of contact with their Independence Coordinator or failure to meet one of the eligibility requirements
- ★ On average, 97% had contact with their Independence Coordinator within the last 30 days

Looking at the 146 young adults who were enrolled in the program in September:

- ★ 5 were living out-of-state
- ★ 11 were pregnant or expecting, and 28 had dependents
- ★ 7 were "couch surfing"; none were in a shelter
- ★ 6 graduated from the program; 5 were terminated
- ★ 91% received Medicaid within the last month; 5 were covered by Letters of Entitlement
- ★ 33% were meeting the educational requirement, 42% were meeting the employment requirement, and 21% were working to remove barriers to employment
- ★ 51 had an IEP while they were in foster care, and 98 had a mental health diagnosis while in care

### Adoption & Guardianship Assistance

A total of four young adults have participated in the adoption assistance piece of the program. Similarly, four young adults have participated in the guardianship assistance piece, although all four were transitioned into the core program per state statute in July. No early discharges have occurred within these populations.

### Satisfaction Survey Results

Satisfaction surveys have been collected by DHHS from nine young adults statewide. These satisfaction surveys were designed by the Evaluation Workgroup and adopted by DHHS. Results from these surveys are highlighted below.

- ★ **Sex:** 7 were female, 2 were male
- ★ **Length of time in program:** 4 were in the program 1-3 months, 1 was in the program 4-6 months, 1 was in the program 7-9 months, and 3 were in the program 10-12 months
- ★ **Race/ethnicity:** 5 were white, 2 were Black/African American, 1 was Hispanic/Latino, and 1 was Russian

Participants were asked to respond to the following items on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The average score of all 9 participants is listed below for each time.

General Questions	
The information I received about the Bridge to Independence program was easy to understand (including printed materials and verbal explanations from DHHS staff).	4.7
I helped lead the development of my Transitional Living Plan.	4.4
I believe the needs and goals in my Transitional Living Plan (including the services I am to receive) meet my needs and will help me become more independent.	4.6
Program Satisfaction Questions	
My Independence Coordinator listens to me and treats me with dignity and respect.	5
My Independence Coordinator communicates and explains things in a way I can understand.	5
My Independence Coordinator is available to meet or talk on the phone when I need him/her, or at times that are convenient to me.	5
My Independence Coordinator takes the time to get to know me and build a positive relationship with me.	5
My Independence Coordinator helped (or is helping) me identify an adult or family member to be a support after I leave the Bridge to Independence program.	4.8
My Independence Coordinator has helped me learn independent living skills.	4.8

Young people were also asked to respond to the following questions. Their answers are typed verbatim below.

**What is your favorite thing about the program?**  
 Easy going, voluntary. Help and support.  
 Having someone there if I need anything. The help.  
 The support it provides both financially and mentally. Helps young adults that don't have help from "mommy and daddy" go get on feet and be success.  
 The information, mentor, and what the program offers.  
 Good communication between [my worker] and I.

**What is your least favorite thing?**  
 I just wish [my worker] was more strict and pushing me.  
 Nothing really except the short length of it.  
 I wasn't in it long enough because of my age.

**What would you change about the program?**  
 The length we can be involved with it. Age range.  
 Don't let people "piggy back" off the system.

**Why are you leaving the program?**  
 Aging out. I'm about to be 21.  
 I'm too old now. I aged out.  
 Aging out and graduating from program.

**How did the program help you?**  
 Helped me with job finding, helped me learn more community resources. Very good program.  
 With a lot. Helped financially.  
 Help me get the things I need and more information on other programs.  
 Saving money mostly, still [my worker] has been helpful in my success as well.  
 I matured more with better vision of my goals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Evaluation tool

*Background: Currently, federal requirements mandate that all states implement a 22-question National Young Adults in Transition Database (NYTD) survey with all young adults in foster care at 17, and then again at 19 and 21. States have the option of implementing two more comprehensive versions of NYTD instead of the basic 22-question survey: NYTD Plus Abbreviated (57 questions) and NYTD Plus Full (88 questions). Currently, Nebraska is using the 22-question NYTD survey both with NYTD participants (in accordance with federal requirements) and with young people in B2I (at entry into the program and every 6 months after).*

- I. We recommend that Nebraska DHHS switch from the 22-question NYTD survey to the NYTD Plus Abbreviated with both populations, and that the survey continue to be administered at the time of entry into the program and every 6 months after. *(Previous recommendation, slightly adjusted.)*
- II. We recommend that a public/private partnership be explored to allow a contract with an independent external evaluator for outreach and collection of surveys, as this agency would have more time to dedicate to collecting surveys and could help young people feel more comfortable in answering honestly. Young adults could take the survey by phone, by submitting a written copy via mail, or online. *(Previous recommendation.)*
  - a. We recommend that during Year 1 of this contract emphasis be placed on collecting surveys from young adults in the program, with efforts expanding to those not in the program in Year 2. Surveys should continue to be collected from young adults by DHHS per federal guidelines. *(Previous recommendation.)*
  - b. We recommend all NYTD responses be stored in a manner that allows the independent external agency to have ongoing and easy access to data. *(Previous recommendation.)*
- III. We recommend that random ID numbers be assigned at the time the young person takes the survey to maintain confidentiality. We recommend that DHHS explore whether the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative would be available for technical assistance on this. *(Previous recommendation.)*
- IV. We recommend that private funding streams be explored to offer incentives to young people to encourage participation in the survey. We recommend that these incentives be offered in the form of \$10 gift cards for young adults in B2I, and that this be expanded to those not in the program when possible. *(Previous recommendation.)*

### Fiscal Accountability

- I. We recommend that DHHS track all expenditures and provide quarterly reports detailing itemized program service costs and program administrative costs, including, but not limited to, specifics about administrative costs, salaries, training costs (including itemized costs, the cost of materials, the number of attendees at each training, travel costs, and the cost to train the trainers), and staff and supervisor turnover and changes (including the location of staff and supervisors) to the Advisory Committee. This should also include itemized adoption and guardianship costs and the state-extended guardianship assistance program costs. *(Previous recommendation. Note: this recommendation was adopted by DHHS, but no quarterly reports have been submitted to the best of the Evaluation Workgroup's knowledge.)*
- II. We recommend that the Advisory Committee review these reports, provide recommendations to DHHS and the Children's Commission if necessary, and include the financial reports and any recommendations made as a part of their annual report to the Children's Commission, HHS Committee of the Legislature, DHHS, and the Governor of the State of Nebraska. *(Previous recommendation.)*

## Tracking Supportive Services

- I. To ensure young adults are receiving the supportive services they need to guide them to success, case managers should clearly document and track specific services provided in the young adult's transition plan and in reports for case reviews and permanency hearings. *(Previous recommendation, adopted per DHHS.)*
  - a. We recommend that the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) continue to review files for young adults in the program to track service provision. We recommend the FCRO include information about how the program is operating and detailed findings regarding the recommendation above in their annual report to the Advisory Committee. *(New recommendation.)*
- II. We recommend that judges or hearing officers or both utilize a series of age and developmentally appropriate questions modeled after those in Through the Eyes' Transition Planning Guide or in NRCYD's resource during hearings to ask young adults about their transition plan, services they're receiving, etc. We recommend the Court Improvement Project look into how these hearings are being handled and provide a report to the Advisory Committee following the first year of implementation. *(Previous recommendation, adjusted.)*

## Young Adult Satisfaction

- I. We recommend that DHHS continue to distribute satisfaction surveys to all young adults leaving the program to assess the reason for leaving and overall satisfaction with the experience. We recommend that these surveys be provided on a quarterly basis to the Advisory Committee. *(Previous recommendation, adjusted.)*
  - a. We recommend this survey be provided along with a stamped envelope for young adults to use to return the survey. We recommend a follow-up phone call be made if the survey is not returned in 3 weeks. If the Independence Coordinator is administering the survey in person, we recommend the young adult be provided an envelope to put their survey in when complete, that the young adult seal said survey, and that the survey be provided directly to the individual in charge of tracking satisfaction survey results. *(Previous recommendation, adjusted.)*
- II. We recommend that a public/private partnership be explored to allow for an incentive of \$10 gift cards for young adults taking the exit survey. *(Previous recommendation.)*
- III. We recommend the independent external agency be responsible for collecting these surveys, administering stipends, analyzing results, and developing the annual report to the Advisory Committee. *(Previous recommendation.)*

## Public/Private Partnership

- I. We recommend private funding and public/private partnerships be explored to support the implementation of these recommendations. *(Previous recommendation.)*

## Recommendations Regarding Ongoing Implementation

*Background: During the process of information-gathering, the Evaluation and Data Workgroup's attention was drawn to several programmatic concerns regarding the program's current operations. The recommendations below attempt to address, bring to light, and possibly mitigate some of these potential issues.*

- I. Despite recent legislative changes, some young people in the program are still not currently receiving Medicaid; rather, they are being covered by letters of entitlement, meaning that all medical costs are coming out of the program budget and not Medicaid. As of October 2015, five young people were being covered by these letters. We recommend that all young people in the program (including those under

guardianship) be covered by Medicaid rather than letters of entitlement to ensure the sustainability of the program.

- a. We also recommend NFOCUS be programmed to send notification letters to both young adults and their Independence Coordinators any time a young person in the program is deemed ineligible for Medicaid or when Medicaid verification is needed.
- II. Some issues have also been identified with Native young adults being able to access services. For example, young people in the Santee tribe leave the system at 18, and the court order doesn't specify they are being discharged to independent living (which is a required component of eligibility per law). We recommend that potential solutions to this be explored to ensure Native young adults are able to access the program.
  - a. One potential solution to this issue – and other issues that have been identified regarding the inclusion of youth involved with the juvenile justice system – currently being discussed by the Juvenile Justice Workgroup is lowering the Bridge to Independence program age to 18. We recommend that the Advisory Committee evaluate the pros, cons, and possible implications of this prior to any final decision. We recommend data be collected from young adults and stakeholders as a part of this process.
- III. Should a similar program be created for young adults involved with juvenile justice, we recommend evaluation and data collection processes operate the same as the current Bridge to Independence program, and that the Evaluation and Data Workgroup receive and review program performance data for both groups of young people.
- IV. We recommend the Advisory Committee and FCRO look at the role of Independence Coordinators in helping young people budget, determine how best to spend their stipend, access financial management education, etc. We would like to note that financial management should be a core component of the Bridge to Independence program.
- V. In addition to the data discussed in the *Current Status* section of this report, we recommend DHHS provide the following data to the Evaluation and Data Workgroup on a biannual basis (in April and October) via an excel spreadsheet of raw, individual-level data, minus identifiable information.
  - a. DOB (or current age)
  - b. City/zip code/Service Area
  - c. Race/ethnicity
  - d. Eligibility category
  - e. Date of discharge from foster care system (and age of youth, if DOB is not provided)) and reason for discharge (e.g. adoption, guardianship, discharged to independent living, aged out)
  - f. Date of application to Bridge to Independence program (and age of youth, if DOB is not provided)
  - g. Date Voluntary Services and Support Agreement was signed (and age of youth, if different from above and if DOB is not provided)
  - h. NYTD survey results
  - i. Date of discharge from the Bridge to Independence program (and age of youth, if DOB is not provided) and reason for discharge (e.g. aged out, terminated due to lack of contact, terminated due to lack of maintaining eligibility [including type of eligibility], etc.)
  - j. Whether youth was provided a satisfaction survey upon discharge