

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee

October 4, 2015

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Wells Fargo Building

1248 O Street, Suite 1130, Lincoln, NE 68508

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Mary Jo Pankoke called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2I) Advisory Committee to order at 9:00 a.m.

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Committee Members present (10):

Lindy Bryceson	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe
Brandy Gustoff	Jill Schubauer (10:14)	
Sarah Helvey	Jennifer Skala	

Committee Members absent (6):

Jodie Austin	Corrie Edwards	Amy Peters
Vernon Davis	Augusta Kamara	Deb Shuck

Ex Officio Members present (2):

Timoree Klingler	Katie McLeese Stephenson
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Ex Officio Members absent (2):

Senator Kate Bolz	Judge Douglas Johnson
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A quorum was established.

Guests in Attendance (9):

Cassy Blakely.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Deanna Brakhage.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Jeanne Brandner.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Division of Juvenile Services
Bethany Connor Allen.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Mary Furnas.....	Foster Care Review Office
Amanda Felton.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Kim Hawekotte.....	Foster Care Review Office
Dan Jenkins.....	Nebraska Legislative Council
Mackenzie Showalter.....	Foster Care Review Office

a. Notice of Publication

Recorder for the meeting, Amanda Felton, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meetings Calendar and Nebraska Children’s Commission website on August 26, 2016 in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. The publication will be kept as a permanent attachment with the meeting minutes.

b. Announcement of the placement of Open Meetings Act information

A copy of the Open Meetings Act was available for public inspection and was located on a table to the side of the meeting room.

III. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Sarah Helvey and seconded by Mary Fraser Meints to approve the agenda as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (9):

Lindy Bryceson	Sarah Helvey	Jennifer Skala
Mary Fraser Meints	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Brandy Gustoff	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe

AGAINST (0):

ABSENT (7):

Jodie Austin	Augusta Kamara	Deb Shuck
Vernon Davis	Amy Peters	
Corrie Edwards	Jill Schubauer	

ABSTAINED (0)

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Approval of November 3, 2015 Meeting Minutes

It was moved by Mary Fraser Meints to approve the minutes of the November 3, 2015 minutes as presented. It was seconded by Sarah Helvey. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (9):

Lindy Bryceson	Sarah Helvey	Jennifer Skala
Mary Fraser Meints	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Brandy Gustoff	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe

AGAINST (0):

ABSENT (7):

Jodie Austin	Augusta Kamara	Deb Shuck
Vernon Davis	Amy Peters	
Corrie Edwards	Jill Schubauer	

ABSTAINED (0)

MOTION CARRIED

V. Foster Care Review Office Data and Trends

Kim Hawekotte, Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO), provided the Committee with an update on their case reviews of B2I youth. Ms. Hawekotte noted that program implementation had only begun in late 2014 and that data trends would become more stable in future reports. She directed members to review the statistical information within the handout. The information outlined several elements of the 176 first review cases including gender, race, ethnicity, service area, housing, marital status, and several others.

Ms. Hawekotte also discussed emerging issues and barriers. Guidance was needed in defining the expectations of both the system and the youth involved. An example was given of the goal to perform face-to-face reviews and the inability to do so due to the lack of availability or motivation to meet in person. This raised the question as to if the number of placements or length of time in out-of-home care had any correlation to their success in the program.

The Committee indicated interest in knowing the percentage of B2I youth that were continuing to live with their foster family as well as information on youth receiving IV-E funds. Other areas that the Committee identified as importance

included the need to ensure the access to positive personal and community supports after aging out of the B2I program. Tracking and encouraging issues such as informal supports, involvement in social activities, and education and referrals to programs such as Preparation for Adult Living Services (PALS) were listed as helpful data to collect for this population.

Conversation led the group to discussion of the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) survey. The current B2I population was being subjected to numerous surveys while enrolled in the program. It was debated if the NYTD survey, which was duplicative of questions asked elsewhere, was a good fit for the intended use. While the NYTD survey gave an accurate overview of the population, it did not meet the need for an evaluation of program function.

A consensus was reached that the Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup should be reinstated. Volunteers for membership of the Workgroup included Mary Furnas, Sarah Helvey, Deanna Brakhage, Doug Lenz, and Mary Fraser Meints. The Workgroup would explore an appropriate way to review young adults prior to exit to identify the supports that are necessary for successful transition.

VI. Department of Health and Human Services Update on Bridge to Independence Program

An update of the data, successes, and barriers of the B2I program was given by Deanna Brakhage, Bridge to Independence Program Specialist. The update began with a brief overview of Medicaid enrollment of the B2I population. The question was raised as to why more youth were not funded under the IV-E category. Since the information was gathered from Medicaid, it was unclear if they had access to that information, but it could be pulled from Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) data for the next meeting.

Ms. Brakhage went on to discuss the supportive services provided to young adults enrolled in the B2I program. With the inability to use DCFS funding per regulation guidelines, knowledge of the community resources became increasingly important. Not all service areas had the same spectrum of supports, but the ICs researched and shared information on available services with their B2I participants.

This information shifted the conversation to the barriers that the program struggles with. Lack of available services within proximity, lack of transportation, poor credit history, and several others can limit the success of the young adults enrolled in the program. There was also the issue of uncommunicative youth who cannot be provided support due to a lack of contact with their IC.

Budget was another topic of interest. Currently the program was over budget and having to closely monitor expenditures. Main items having impact on the higher than expected costs included the implementation of the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility tool and the corresponding increase in payment rate, maintenance payments for the children of B2I participants, and the IV-E penetration. A summary comparison of budgeted funds vs. expenditures was requested for future meetings.

Travel cost was also noted as having a large impact on the estimated costs and research was being done on how to execute travel more efficiently. The program was currently experiencing an all-time high for B2I participants. Given the requirement for ICs to meet with the young adults face-to-face on a monthly basis has proved to be a significant hindrance.

Other subjects the group covered included staff turnover, caseload numbers, the educational needs of the population, and the penetration rate of IV-E. A question was raised regarding the low IV-E penetration rate. Ms. Brakhage explained that IV-E was currently determined on their status while in foster care unless it has been more than 180 days from the last episode of foster care at which point the youth must be re-determined for IV-E qualification. This procedure is currently being evaluated to see if this is the best option for youth. Additional information would be gathered and brought to a future meeting.

VII. Juvenile Justice Extension Taskforce Report and Recommendations

Cassy Blakely, Assistant Vice President of Youth Policy with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, provided an update on LR514. This Legislative Resolution aimed to 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. Ms. Blakely explained that there had been difficulty in defining the population. After LB866 failed to make it to the floor last legislative session, efforts had been renewed to propose it again in the upcoming session.

Current efforts had been assisted from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Two eligibility requirements for the program had been determined: Young adults in out-of-home placement at age 19 and a presence of a “contrary to the best interest” dispositional order as the prompt for out-of-home placement.

Concern was raised regarding potential complications regarding IV-E eligibility if the requirements for participation in this program are differently than those for B2I. Debate occurred as to if the eligibility requirements of the two programs differed greatly. Consideration also needed to be given to how the outcome may be effected by an update to IV-E qualifications. The group agreed that additional information on the eligibility criteria for both programs was needed to determine the feasibility of creating the new program.

VIII. Public Comment

Chair Pankoke opened the floor for public comment. There was no public comment given.

IX. New Business

There was no new business to discuss.

X. Upcoming Meeting Planning

Chair Pankoke summarized the items from the day’s discussion to be reviewed at future meetings:

- Review requested data from the FCRO including:
 - the number of young adults in B2I continuing to live with their foster families
 - examining if a correlation exists between the success of young adults in B2I and their length of time in out-of-home care/number of placements prior to aging out of foster care
 - data on the B2I population receiving IV-E funds
 - information on the informal supports and involvement in social activities of the population prior to aging out of the B2I program
- Review of requested data from DCFS including:
 - data on the B2I population receiving IV-E funds
 - a summary of the program’s budgeted funds vs. expenditures
 - an update on the evaluation of IV-E qualification procedures
- An update on the recommendations and data of the Juvenile Justice Taskforce and work on LR514
- Discuss the potential of forming a subgroup to address the current barriers faced by the B2I program including but not limited to IV-E funding issues.

Ms. Blakely encouraged the members to attend or stream the hearing for LR514 that was scheduled for October 19th. She also welcomed any information or suggestions regarding IV-E funding issues to be shared to the group in the lead up to the next meeting. Sarah Helvey, Child Welfare Program Director and Staff Attorney with Nebraska Appleseed, mentioned that she would be attending a national conference for child welfare advocates where she would share the information from the day’s meeting for input.

The group agreed that the next meeting would be sometime in early November with an attendance poll being sent to members via email to determine a final date.

XI. Adjourn

It was moved by Sarah Helvey and seconded by Brandy Gustoff to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.

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