

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee  
November 3, 2015  
9:00 AM – 11:30 AM  
Chez Hay Event Center  
210 N. 14<sup>th</sup> Street

**Call to Order**

Mary Jo Pankoke called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 9:00 a.m. and noted that the Open Meetings Act information was posted in the room as required by state law.

**Roll Call**

*Advisory Committee Members present (8):*

Mary Fraser Meints	Timoree Klinger	Jill Schubauer
Brandy Gustoff	Doug Lenz	Jennifer Skala
Sarah Helvey	Mary Jo Pankoke	

*Advisory Committee Members Present Via Phone\* (2):*

Jodie Austin	Betsy Vidlak
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*Advisory Committee Members absent (4):*

Nathan Busch	Amy Peters
Corrie Edwards	Lana Verbrigghe

*Ex-Officio Members absent (3):*

Senator Kate Bolz	Judge Douglas F. Johnshon	Katie McLeese Stephenson
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A quorum was established

*Also in attendance (15):*

Deanna Brakhage.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Jeanne K. Brandner.....	Administrative Office of Probation
Bethany Connor Allen.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Michael Fargen.....	Foster Care Review Office
Amanda Felton.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Kim Hawekotte.....	Foster Care Review Office
Ronda Newman.....	Project Everlast
Doug Peters.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Cassy Rockwell.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Shayne Schiermeister.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Meagann Schweitzer.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Juliet Summers.....	Voices for Children in Nebraska
Trenton Waite.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Schalisha Walker.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Amy West.....	Project Everlast

\*Voting members attending via phone were not included in quorum nor voting matters.

## **Approval of Agenda**

Mary Jo announced a change in the meeting agenda in order to have the Juvenile Justice Extension Taskforce report first on the agenda. Mary Jo asked for a motion to approve the agenda with this change. The motion was made and seconded. Roll Call vote as follows:

### **FOR (8):**

Mary Fraser Meints  
Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey

Timoree Klinger  
Doug Lenz  
Mary Jo Pankoke

Jill Schubauer  
Jennifer Skala

### **AGAINST (0):**

### **ABSENT (4):**

Nathan Busch  
Corrie Edwards

Amy Peters  
Lana Verbrigghe

### **ABSTAINED (2):**

Jodie Austin\*

Betsy Vidlak\*

## **MOTION CARRIED.**

### **Juvenile Justice Report – Juliet Summers, Jeanne Brandner, & Cassy Rockwell**

The Juvenile Justice Extension Taskforce was formed to fulfill the legislative requirement that the B2i Advisory Committee develop recommendations regarding expanding the B2i program to similar groups of at-risk youth. Mary Jo Pankoke asked Juliet Summers and Jeanne Brandner to co-chair the Taskforce.

Juliet Summers reported that focus groups were held across the state, both urban and rural, in order to gather input from both adult and youth stakeholders. Sixteen focus groups were formed in just under a month, eight of which consisted of adults. Forty-two adults made up the adult focus groups that had membership consisting of case managers, probation officers, judges, service providers, and mentors. Cassy Rockwell organized the focus groups for youth who were currently or formerly involved with the juvenile justice system in Nebraska.

Many nineteen year olds were aging out of probation without supports or resources. The takeaway from the adult focus groups was the importance of putting parameters on the eligibility to get into the B2i program. To be eligible for B2i, a young person must have a 3A adjudication.

There were 60 participants in the youth focus groups. The Taskforce found the need for the program to be voluntary and flexible while recognizing that the young people involved should be treated as adults. There was emphasis on young parents and recognition that the communities must have solid support in order to succeed. As the final note, Ms. Summers shared the need for normal life experiences such as paying bills, applying for a job, etc. There was a desire of the youth to know how to be a self-sufficient successful adult, but they lack the skills to do such.

All of this information was brought to the Taskforce at their two meetings. Many of the members were passionate about how to treat kids in Nebraska uniformly regardless of the system. A subset of youth in the Juvenile Justice program was found who were aging out of the system without a safe and supportive family to return to.

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The Taskforce identified the following priority recommendations:

1. Young people under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Office of Probation (AOP) and 3B wards under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) who are in out-of-home placement on their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday should be able to voluntarily opt into Bridge to Independence between ages 19-21 if it is determined that it is in their best interest to do so, due to lack of alternative supports.

The Taskforce identified the following options for future consideration:

1. Young people under the jurisdiction of the AOP and 3B wards under the jurisdiction of DHHS who are in out-of-home placement at age 18 should be able to voluntarily receive case management services until they reach age 21.
2. All young people who receive support and services from the AOP at age 18 can access services from a central navigator until they reach age 21.

### **Approval of Taskforce Report**

Mary Jo asked for a motion to approve the Taskforce Report and for submission to the Children's Commission at their November 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. The motion was made and seconded. Roll Call vote as follows:

#### **FOR (8):**

Mary Fraser Meints  
Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey

Timoree Klinger  
Doug Lenz  
Mary Jo Pankoke

Jill Schubauer  
Jennifer Skala

#### **AGAINST (0):**

#### **ABSENT (4):**

Nathan Busch  
Corrie Edwards

Amy Peters  
Lana Verbrigghe

#### **ABSTAINED (2):**

Jodie Austin\*

Betsy Vidlak\*

#### **MOTION CARRIED.**

### **Implementation Update from DHHS – Deanna Brakhage**

Deanna Brakhage from DHHS presented the 2015 B2i report. She reported that there were 146 young adults in the Bridge to Independence program, 20% of which were working. Ms. Brakhage mentioned that couch surfing was a new data collection item that was recently added. What they had seen from the data was that employment was going up and education was going down.

The program had 5 young adults currently out of state in Louisiana, Missouri, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma. The number of young adults with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) was 51 out of 146. Ms. Brakhage also noted that DHHS was looking into eligibility for IV-E funds for the B2i program.

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## **Foster Care Review Office Data – Kim Hawekotte**

Kim Hawekotte, Director of the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO), informed the members that the annual report was due December 1<sup>st</sup>, at which time there would be more information available.

The document passed out covered the reviews from February 1, 2015 – September 30, 2015. Ms. Hawekotte explained that FCRO staff reviewed a youth once they had been in the program for 4 or 5 months with reviews every 6 months thereafter. The FCRO tried as much as possible to meet the youth individually for reviews, but some youth preferred to talk by phone.

Ms. Hawekotte reviewed the statistics of the 91 reviews between February and September of 2015. Discussion occurred regarding the issue of couch surfing. The FCRO had not had much response for this category, but explained that they had reservations of youth identifying that they are couch surfing. It was hypothesized that the youth would categorize their living arrangement as shared living space as opposed to couch surfing.

Other items identified as needing attention included a push towards completion of education and focus on providing life skills to be successful upon aging out of the system. The FCRO had goals to expand data collection on future reviews to better identify systemic issues.

Positives areas identified by collected data included the work of the Independence Coordinators to develop relationships with young people and assist them in reaching their goals. Areas needing continued work included reducing Independence Coordinator turnover, placing a greater emphasis on helping young people reach for a better future as opposed to only focusing on stability, and addressing gaps in services.

## **Evaluation and Data Workgroup Report – Amy West**

Amy West presented the report from the Evaluation and Data Workgroup. The workgroup recommended that DHHS expand its data collection by switching from the 22-question National Young Adults in Transition Database (NYTD) survey to the NYTD Plus Abbreviated survey that contains 57 questions. The workgroup also recommended that a public/private partnership be explored to allow a contract with an independent external evaluator for outreach and collection of surveys. It was felt that this could help young people feel more comfortable in answering honestly.

Amy highlighted several programmatic concerns regarding the B2i program's current operations:

- Despite recent legislative changes, some young people in the program were still not currently receiving Medicaid; rather, they were being covered by letters of entitlement, meaning that all medical costs were coming out of the program budget and not Medicaid. As of October 2015, five young people were being covered by these letters. It is recommended that all young people in the program be covered by Medicaid rather than letters of entitlement to ensure sustainability of the program.
- Some issues had been identified with Native young adults being able to access services. An example given was that 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 required by law to be eligible for the program. It is recommended that potential solutions to this be explored to ensure Native young adults are able to access the program.
- It is recommended that there be a greater emphasis by the Independence Coordinators on helping young people budget, determine how best to spend their stipend, and to access financial management education.

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**Approval of the Evaluation and Data Workgroup Report**

Mary Jo asked for a motion to accept the Evaluation and Data Workgroup’s Report. A motion was made and seconded. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (8):**

Mary Fraser Meints  
Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey

Timoree Klinger  
Doug Lenz  
Mary Jo Pankoke

Jill Schubauer  
Jennifer Skala

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (4):**

Nathan Busch  
Corrie Edwards

Amy Peters  
Lana Verbrigghe

**ABSTAINED (2):**

Jodie Austin\*

Betsy Vidlak\*

**MOTION CARRIED.**

**Adjournment**

Mary Jo asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made and seconded. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (8):**

Mary Fraser Meints  
Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey

Timoree Klinger  
Doug Lenz  
Mary Jo Pankoke

Jill Schubauer  
Jennifer Skala

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (4):**

Nathan Busch  
Corrie Edwards

Amy Peters  
Lana Verbrigghe

**ABSTAINED (2):**

Jodie Austin\*

Betsy Vidlak\*

**MOTION CARRIED.**

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