

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

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee

November 3, 2016

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 19th, 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.