

Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee

May 25, 2017

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Nebraska State Bar Association

635 S 14th St Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68508

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Co-Chair, Jeanne Brandner, called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 1:10 p.m. She welcomed everyone and the group did formal introductions.

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Committee Members present (9):

Ali Al-Kazahg	Doug Lenz	Jennifer Skala
Alyson Goedken	Mary Jo Pankoke	Susan Thomas
Sarah Helvey	Amy Peters	Julia Tse

Committee Members absent (7):

Jodie Austin	Brandy Gustoff	Lana Verbrigghe
Vernon Davis	Jill Schubauer	
Mary Fraser Meints	Deb Shuck	

Ex-Officio Members present (2):

Jeanne Brandner	Deb VanDyke-Ries
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Ex-Officio Members absent (4):

Senator Kate Bolz	Timoree Klingler	Kim Thomas
Judge Douglas Johnson	Katie McLeese Stephenson	

A quorum was established.

Guests in Attendance (10):

Kayla Bailey*	Project Everlast
Cassy Blakely	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Deanna Brakhage	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Bethany Connor Allen	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Amanda Felton	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Mary Furnas	Foster Care Review Office
Mallory Goertzen	SCC Practicum Student/Nebraska Children’s Commission
Kim Hawekotte	Foster Care Review Office
Felipe Longoria	Central Plains Center for Service
Jessica Walters*	Project Everlast

*Former foster youth participants who joined the conversation via telephone conference.

a. Notice of Publication

Recorder for the meeting, Mallory Goertzen, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meetings Calendar and Nebraska Children’s Commission website in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. The publication would 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 the table at the back of the meeting room.

III. Approval of Agenda

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

FOR (8):

Alyson Goedken
Sarah Helvey
Doug Lenz

Mary Jo Pankoke
Amy Peters
Jennifer Skala

Susan Thomas
Julia Tse

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (1):

Ali Al-Kazhg

ABSENT (7):

Jodie Austin
Vernon Davis
Mary Fraser Meints

Brandy Gustoff
Jill Schubauer
Deb Shuck

Lana Verbrigghe

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Approval of November 3, 2016 Meeting Minutes

It was moved by Sarah Helvey to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2017 minutes as presented. It was seconded by Doug Lenz. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (8):

Alyson Goedken
Sarah Helvey
Doug Lenz

Mary Jo Pankoke
Amy Peters
Jennifer Skala

Susan Thomas
Julia Tse

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (1):

Ali Al-Kazhg

ABSENT (7):

Jodie Austin
Vernon Davis
Mary Fraser Meints

Brandy Gustoff
Jill Schubauer
Deb Shuck

Lana Verbrigghe

MOTION CARRIED

V. Discussion of LB179

Cassy Blakely, Assistant Vice President of Youth Policy with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, provided an update on the progress of LB179. Blakely stated that bill had not moved out of Committee and would remain so until the next session began. There were no votes for or against the bill and the conversations of this group could influence any changes that may need to happen to move the legislation forward.

VI. Foster Care Review Office Update

Mary Furnas from the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) discussed her work with the committee. She indicated that they tracked all of the youth participants and regularly received updates from the Independence Coordinators. Furnas would be sending out a monthly list to the Independence Coordinators to help youth set up FCRO review meetings. She would also be sending out a survey to gather information about the youth and what options for contact would be most flexible for their communication style and availability.

Kim Hawekotte, Director of the FCRO, spoke on the number of reviews that staff were conducting. Topics covered by Hawekotte included demographics, housing status, family status, program eligibility, employment,

and several others. The group voiced concern about the short term status of housing. Furnas explained that the data's shortfall was that it did not reflect the reasons for housing change. She gave the example of a change in housing that may have been due to positive circumstances.

The relationships of youth were briefly discussed, noting that the quality and permanency of the relationships may need to be considered when ensuring youth have supports upon exiting the program. Blakely remarked on data from a recent survey performed by the Connected Youth Initiative which showed that a majority of youth who indicated having supportive individuals in their lives, would not be able to rely on those supports for concrete assistance such as financial assistance. The committee wanted to focus on ensuring that B2i participants had a long-term adult support rather than just peer relationships.

Another area of concern included the court proceedings for permanency hearings as they were required annually for IV-E drawdown. Data collection would be helpful to track the progress of scheduling and follow-through. Members discussed how positive reinforcement from the judge during the hearings could be very empowering for youth to succeed. A youth's success could also be impacted by the fact that the program didn't cover all education and career paths that the young adults may want to pursue. Vocational Rehabilitation provided some job training opportunities, but the Committee was interested in looking into other possible avenues for assistance such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

VII. Department of Health and Human Services Update

Alyson Goedken, DHHS Administrator, shared information on the statutory and program barriers. One area of concern was around the process for dismissal from the program. The criteria for the dismissal of a B2i participant was fairly limited and included no restrictions regarding re-entry. Because of this a youth could re-enter immediately after being dismissed. This brought the conversation to the issue of worker safety when entering the home of a youth and how to ensure both participant and worker felt safe, especially after an incident may have occurred.

The group also conversed on the statutory challenge surrounding stipend amounts. Currently, all youth received the same stipend which was based on the reimbursement rates received prior to aging out. However, with the recent shift of the rates being based on the caregiver's responsibilities, there was disconnect between the two payment scenarios. DHHS was in the process of researching stipend methodologies from other states and would keep the Committee updated on their findings.

Regarding program barriers, there was the need to identify the core components to enhance sustainability as well as find the balance between entitlement and sustainability. Members discussed how the lack of financial stability may not be an issue of stipend amounts, but rather a need for adjustment in case management. There may need to be data gathered in order to do a comparison of youth who were successful and youth who struggle.

VIII. Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup Update

Dr. Katie Bass, Chairperson of the Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup, could not attend the meeting but shared a handout with members. The handout provided an update on the work completed to date as well as outlined next steps for the group.

IX. IV-E Penetration Rate Discussion

Goedken informed the Committee that the recent IV-E State plan amendment had been approved. IV-E eligibility could now be determined at the time of entering B2i at age 19. Based on discussion with an outside consultant there was hope that there will a 20% increase based on this change alone. There was also work in progress to look at how to streamline the process for non-IV-E youth. The Workgroup would reach out to other agencies on their process, and were looking to see if the B2i application could include a release of information clause. This would allow the department to access IV-E eligibility documentation that had previously been difficult to obtain from program participants.

X. Public Comment

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

XI. New Business

There was no new business.

XII. Upcoming Meeting Planning

Ali Al-Kazahg indicated that he would like future meetings to look at how to best build up the social skills for youth exiting the foster care system. The Committee agreed that it would like to meet more frequently with the next meeting scheduled for July or early August.

XIII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:14.

MG & AF