

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE EVALUATION AND DATA COLLECTION WORKGROUP UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

December 2017

EVALUATION AND DATA COLLECTION WORKGROUP

The Bridge to Independence (B2i) Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup (“workgroup”) met twice prior to the December meeting of the B2i Advisory Committee (“Advisory Committee”). The group has three areas of focus: (1) Coordinating and providing feedback on the external evaluation; (2) Reviewing and guiding the data that exists from other organizations that are provided to the B2i Advisory Committee; and (3) Identifying the desired outcomes for young adults in the B2i program.

This update contains the Workgroup’s recommendations, consensus, and current work. The Workgroup respectfully requests that the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee adopt these recommendations.

COORDINATING AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

DHHS-CFS, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFE), the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) and the Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) have begun the process of designing an external evaluation for the Bridge to Independence Program. The B2i population participates in evaluations from several different entities, along with data being collected by several entities. The independent evaluation will be carefully designed to ensure that the outcomes for this population are clearly identified and determine correctly which measure will demonstrate whether or not young adults are making progress towards these outcomes. The most recent evaluation proposal is [attached](#).

PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

The evaluation proposal suggests the below six questions as those that should be answered by the evaluation:

1. Does participating in B2i enhance young adult outcomes (education, employment, financial, housing, parenting, well-being) during the transition to adulthood, during the program, and after the program?
2. How does B2i case management and the stipend influence young adult outcomes during the program and after graduating from the program?

3. What young adult personal or life characteristics influence success in B2i? Is the program targeting the right population, do length of time in foster care, number of placement changes, substance use, or mental health challenges, impact success?
4. Do young adults who participate in B2i perceive they have gained knowledge, skills, and relationships in preparing to transition to adulthood?
5. Does case management at younger ages (<19 years) prepare young adults for the B2i program?
6. How is the B2i program being implemented in different communities, and what are the successes and challenges to implementing each program component?

Recommendation 1: The Data and Evaluation Committee recommends that these six questions guide the Bridge to Independence Program Evaluation.

EVALUATION COORDINATION

The current evaluation proposal has identified three components described below and the group recommends that they be undertaken in the order described below. The descriptions of each task are taken from the ChildTrend’s Evaluation of Nebraska Extended Foster Care – Bridge to Independence Program Proposal dated November 16, 2017.

1. Outcome Analysis and Data Consultation

Description: This task includes a preliminary analysis of existing survey data, including that from the Outpatient Payment System (OPPS), National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), and the Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) to determine if the data sets are useful in examining the above research questions. This process will result in a memorandum detailing tasks to accomplish during the study period.

2. Youth Assessment of Bridge to Independence Program and Other Supports and Services

Description: Child Trends researchers will assess how the b2i program is serving young people in Nebraska by conducting focus groups with young people in four Nebraska communities (two rural and two urban). A mix of young people will be invited to participate—both those who are currently participating in the B2i program (or other extended care activities) as well as those youth no longer participating in extended care activities. The qualitative study will identify promising strategies and generate lessons for the broader child welfare field through input from young adults about their perceptions of the B2i program as well as other available services and supports (whether the programs and services provided them with new knowledge, skills, and relationships), and reasons for staying in care or leaving care.

3. Develop Framework for Nebraska and Other States to Assess Extended Care.

Description: Develop a framework for Nebraska to use to conduct ongoing assessment of their extension of care program. In developing the framework, the research team will document the process paying close attention to how the framework and learnings in Nebraska can reach other states.

Recommendation 2: The Workgroup strongly supports Task 1, Outcome Analysis and Data Consultation, as a necessary first step to defining outcomes and establishing a sustainable framework for data analysis of the B2i Program. An ideal external evaluation should focus on quantitative data first and then shift to qualitative data, undertaking the three tasks in the order described above.

DATA AND EVALUATION COLLECTION WORKGROUP COMMITTEE ROLE IN EVALUATION

The Workgroup will continue to play a role in the evaluation by providing comments and feedback on future versions of proposals and agreements for the Evaluation. The group Support NCFE and DHHS in creating Memoranda of Understanding to share the data necessary to complete the evaluation. The Workgroup will additionally be available assist in the design or implementation of the external evaluation, including through identifying research and focus group questions.

DHHS CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI) PROCESS

DHHS has created a CQI process to examine point in time data collected through the Bridge to Independence Program. This data is run on a monthly basis and examine by DHHS and stakeholders for program, and process improvement.

DHHS-CFS has provided information and data from the B2i CQI process, which has been reviewed and discussed at length but the Workgroup. The Workgroup will continue to review this data and support DHHS in its CQI process.

Recommendation 3: The Workgroup will continue to review the CQI data information at each meeting to determine if additional data or trends are relevant to and should be forwarded onto the Advisory Committee. The following information is identified as key for the review of the Advisory Committee:

- 1. IV-E eligibility data;**
- 2. Data related to the benefits and programs that young adults enrolled in the B2i program are accessing;**
- 3. Number of entries; and**
- 4. Total number of young adult served in each fiscal year for the fiscal years of 14, 15, 16, and 17.**

UPDATE ON TITLE IV-E DATA

Income Maintenance Foster care staff and DCFS staff improved communication about Title IV-E eligibility by creating a spreadsheet of young adults who are pending eligibility determination have been denied eligibility. This sheet communicates the next steps for staff on each young adult related to eligibility. This communication is expected to increase Title IV-E funding by allowing staff to take follow up steps to establish eligibility and identify common reasons for denial.

The current CQI process will collect data on the number of young adults who are currently employed, which has a significant impact on Title IV-E eligibility. The income limit for Title IV-E eligibility is \$411 a month, which is easily reached by a young adult working at a minimum wage job. Knowing this information will provide a more accurate idea of the number of young adults who can be expected to receive Title IV-E funding.

Recommendation 4: The Workgroup will continue to work closely with DHHS to examine data related to Title IV-E penetration, and support program and process changes necessary to increase the number of young adults who are eligible for and receiving Title IV-E funding.

BENEFITS AND PROGRAMS ACCESSED BY YOUNG ADULTS ON THE B2I PROGRAM

The 2017 Annual report of the Advisory Committee identified the need to coordinate services and eliminate the duplication of services for young adults who are parenting. The Advisory Committee set a goal to explore the structure of B2i stipends for pregnant and parenting young adults who also receive TANF funds to best support Nebraska's families and reduce the "cliff effect" when young adults leave the B2i Program. The Workgroup recognizes that families need additional support and this support must be coordinated to achieve maximum benefit so that all young adults and children can reach their full potential. At this time, young adults may be receiving the B2i stipend for themselves, additional stipends for each minor dependent, as well as TANF funding if eligible.

The current Bridge to Independence stipend and dependence child stipend are based on Nebraska's foster care maintenance payments and are set by DHHS. This stipend amount is currently under the consideration of DHHS to recognize the current General Funds shortfall, to remain in line with other Nebraska support programs, and reflect best practices identified by other states. The group supports a careful analysis of the stipend amount and has identified the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission as the appropriate body to make this determination.

Recommendation 5: The Workgroup requests that the Nebraska Children's Commission tasks the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee to develop a recommendation for the minimum adequate rate for a maintenance payment for young adults in the Bridge to Independence program who are parenting (a) minor child(ren) consistent with state and federal requirements.

LIVING ARRANGEMENT DATA

Safe and stable housing is essential to a successful transition to adulthood. The group has identified that current NFOCUS options do not reflect that a young adults may be experiencing homelessness or be at risk of becoming homeless. The Workgroup agrees that this information must be tracked in order to ensure that young adults have their basic needs met, and can be referred to appropriate services. More information about this population can be reviewed in the Chapin Hall Brief [*Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America.*](#)

Recommendation 6: Data collected related to living arrangement should reflect young adults who are experiencing homelessness and unstable housing.

FOSTER CARE REVIEW OFFICE DATA COLLECTION

The Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) has a statutory duty to review Bridge to Independence cases, and has identified a need to focus on data from which conclusions about the program may be drawn. The review process will focus on broader outcome issues, including the progress the young adult has made on their goals, such as employment or education. The case file reviews will evaluate:

1. Young adult goals and the progress made on goals;
2. Independence Coordinator responsibilities; and
3. Young Adult responsibilities.

The FCRO has asked the Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup to answer the three following questions to enhance the review and data collection process:

1. What are the broad goals that should be addressed?
2. What are the Independence Coordinator responsibilities for which the FCRO should provide oversight?
3. What are the young adult's responsibilities for which the FCRO should provide oversight?

Recommendation 7: The Workgroup will continue to provide comments and feedback on the FCRO Bridge to Independence case review process.