

**Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee**

June 7, 2018

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Lincoln Community Foundation, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room  
215 Centennial Mall South Lincoln, NE 68508

**I. Call to Order and Welcome**

Co-Chair, Mary Jo Pankoke, called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 9:07 a.m.

**II. Roll Call and Introductions**

***Committee Members present (13):***

Whitney Beck (9:10)	Brandy Gustoff	Juliet Summers
Nathan Collier	Sarah Helvey	Susan Thomas
Vernon Davis	Doug Lenz	Lana Verbrigghe (9:16)
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	
Alyson Goedken	Jennifer Skala	

***Committee Members absent (3):***

Jodie Austin	Jill Schubauer	Deb Shuck
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***Ex-Officio Members present (3):***

Katie McLeese Stephenson (10:35)	Tami Soper*	Deb VanDyke-Ries
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***Ex-Officio Members absent (4):***

Jeanne Brandner	Timoree Klingler
Judge Douglas Johnson	Kim Thomas

A quorum was established.

\*Let it be noted for the record that Tami Soper was designated temporary proxy by Senator Kate Bolz.

***Guests in Attendance (7):***

Dr. Katie Bass.....	Foster Care Review Office
Kayla Bailey**.....	Project Everlast
Deanna Brakhage.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Amanda Felton.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Mary Ann Harvey.....	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Chris Jones.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Kristen Stiffler.....	Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature

\*\*Indicates a guest speaker attending via video conference

*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 Meeting 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 sign-in table near the entrance of the meeting room.

**III. Approval of Agenda**

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

**FOR (11):**

Nathan Collier	Brandy Gustoff	Jennifer Skala
Vernon Davis	Sarah Helvey	Juliet Summers
Mary Fraser Meints	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Alyson Goedken	Mary Jo Pankoke	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (5):**

Jodie Austin  
Whitney Beck

Jill Schubauer  
Deb Shuck

Lana Verbrigghe

**MOTION CARRIED**

#### **IV. Approval of Minutes**

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It was moved by Susan Thomas to approve the minutes of the December 15, 2017 minutes with the following amendments:

- Complete the sentence in the second paragraph of item five referring to the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee to reflect the recommendation provided by the B2i Evaluation & Data Collection Workgroup.
- The first sentence in the third paragraph of item five should read "recommendation number two"
- Correct all roll call votes to accurately reflect Juliet Summers' presence during votes

The motion was seconded by Mary Fraser Meints. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (13):**

Whitney Beck  
Nathan Collier  
Vernon Davis  
Mary Fraser Meints  
Alyson Goedken

Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey  
Doug Lenz  
Mary Jo Pankoke  
Jennifer Skala

Juliet Summers  
Susan Thomas  
Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (3):**

Jodie Austin

Jill Schubauer

Deb Shuck

**MOTION CARRIED**

#### **V. Co-Chair Report**

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Co-Chair Pankoke welcomed Chris Jones, the new Policy Analyst with the Nebraska Children's Commission. Chris introduced herself and gave a brief background of her experience working in the child welfare system.

*a. Statutory Structure*

Co-Chair Pankoke entertained discussion around the structure of the B2i Advisory Committee. With the recent introduction of [LR451](#), the Commission was working to review each group for potential revisions to their structure and/or purpose. Members debated the necessity of having the Committee continue as a statutory body. Given that the Committee's recommendations regarding expansion to similar at-risk populations were still in progress, they felt it important that the group continue under statute. They also agreed the annual report should recommend a change to statutory language to support the continuation of the B2i Advisory Committee even if the Children's Commission should sunset.

*b. Membership Reappointments*

Co-Chair Pankoke reminded members that several member positions were up for reappointment. She encouraged members to reapply if they wished to continue and to pass along word to any interested individuals. The Nebraska Children's Commission would be voting on membership appointments at their July 31<sup>st</sup> meeting.

#### **VI. Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup Update**

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Dr. Katie Bass, Chair of the Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup and Research Director with the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO), provided an update from the group. The biggest item of note was that the external evaluation proposal from ChildTrends had been approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The first step of the evaluation would be coordinated with the workgroup. It was noted that this type of evaluation would be the first of its kind. The

evaluation would assist in establishing a framework for the program to gather internal data and outcome measures for Nebraska as well as to be used nationwide.

## **VII. Finance and Policy Workgroup Update**

Workgroup Co-Chairs, Alyson Goedken and Jennifer Skala, provided an update on the work of the group. Ms. Skala informed the group that the recommendation to alter regulation language increasing the hourly requirement of activities in the Barriers program to 80 hours had recently been submitted in draft form. Another recommendation from the workgroup was the requirement for Nebraska residency. Members of the workgroup noted that the recommendation should be updated to reflect not only students attending school elsewhere, but youth who had been placed out of state while in the care of the DHHS. These recommendations were also contingent upon approval from federal partners.

Ms. Skala noted that the workgroup had addressed all of the issues that they had been tasked with upon the revival of the group. Unless the B2i Advisory Committee had other areas for the workgroup to examine, she recommended archiving the group until further tasks should arise. Members agreed that this would be an appropriate action given the accomplishments of the group.

## **VIII. Department of Health and Human Services Update**

Alyson Goedken distributed a [packet of CQI data](#) to that group. Ms. Goedken highlighted the jump in IV-E eligible participants from 7 to 102 young adults in the last year. She also informed the members that they had verified that participants in the B2i program were not eligible to receive Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) funds. Other data reviewed included the number of young adults served by the B2i program, percentage of state wards enrolling in B2i within 30 days of aging out, and participant exit reasons.

Ms. Goedken directed attention to the final slide of the presentation. She clarified that the category “Other Reasons” included things such as custody transfers to adult court, achievement of independent living, marriages, military enrollment, and aging out of the system. As participation in B2i increased, this data would be monitored to ensure that the program was not a disincentive to permanency.

Discussion ensued regarding the recent adjustment to the dependent stipend given to program participants. The B2i Advisory Committee had previously motioned to request that the Nebraska Children’s Commission (Commission) task 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. This motion was proposed to the Commission at their January 17, 2018 meeting and was not approved. The Commission had opted to allow the payment rate to be determined at the discretion of the DHHS.

Ms. Goedken informed members that an updated rate consistent with the FCPay determination had been implemented by the DHHS and took effect as of May 24, 2018. She indicated that a notice went out to all effected participants 30 days prior to the change in payment. Ms. Goedken noted that Independence Coordinators have been instructed to identify participants for whom the reduction would create a financial hardship, and a new assessment would be performed for those individuals. Members expressed concern in the dramatic drop in payment as well as the mechanism used to determine an appropriate rate, voicing that further review by the Committee was warranted.

Members asked for additional information from Ms. Goedken on the determination process. They requested a copy of the guidance letter issued to affected participants be shared with the Committee. They also voiced concern on why so few participants were accessing child care subsidies and requested additional information on the issue.

## **IX. Foster Care Review Office Update**

Dr. Bass indicated that the FCRO had coordinated with both the Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup and DHHS to identify ways to improve their case review process. She provided members with a [draft copy of the review form](#) that was to be used. Efforts were in progress to ensure that young adults were able to provide information to the FCRO in easily accessible ways including mobile capable formats. The new form was set to go live on July 1, 2018. Dr. Bass noted that additional changes may occur as the external evaluation progressed.

## **X. B2i Advisory Committee Annual Report**

Members reviewed discussion from the day on elements to add and update within the [B2i Advisory Committee annual report](#). One area of focused discussion included the need to utilize the B2i program as a mechanism for prevention. Ms. Goedken noted that recent data had shown that for children ages 0-5 who were removed from their home, 46% had a parent who had been a former ward. By providing life skills and support to young adults exiting the system, the program is one way to help decrease the amount of intergenerational system involvement. Members pointed to this issues as an area in need of additional focus moving forward.

It was moved by Susan Thomas and seconded by Vernon Davis that the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee examine prevention efforts and services to mitigate the intergenerational cycle of system involvement within the program population. No further discussion ensued. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (12):**

Whitney Beck	Brandy Gustoff	Jennifer Skala
Nathan Collier	Sarah Helvey	Juliet Summers
Vernon Davis	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (1):**

Alyson Goedken

**ABSENT (3):**

Jodie Austin	Jill Schubauer	Deb Shuck
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**MOTION CARRIED**

There was lengthy discussion from members which led to several motions. The first of which was a motion by Juliet Summers to update report recommendation 2 to read "Eligibility for the Bridge to Independence Program includes the requirement of Nebraska residency, not to exclude young adults placed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) through Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), nor students attending school outside of Nebraska who still claim Nebraska residency. This recommendation is contingent on approval from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)." This motion was seconded by Jennifer Skala. There was no additional discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (12):**

Whitney Beck	Brandy Gustoff	Jennifer Skala
Nathan Collier	Sarah Helvey	Juliet Summers
Vernon Davis	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (1):**

Alyson Goedken

**ABSENT (3):**

Jodie Austin	Jill Schubauer	Deb Shuck
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**MOTION CARRIED**

Juliet Summers made a motion that the statutory recommendation table on page 14 should include the expansion of the B2i program to young adults exiting juvenile justice system who were placed out of home at age 19 as well as young adults who have experienced terminated or disrupted guardianships or adoptions. Sarah Helvey seconded the motion. No further discussion ensued. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (12):**

Whitney Beck	Brandy Gustoff	Jennifer Skala
Nathan Collier	Sarah Helvey	Juliet Summers
Vernon Davis	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (1):**

Alyson Goedken

**ABSENT (3):**

Jodie Austin	Jill Schubauer	Deb Shuck
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**MOTION CARRIED**

The next motion revolved around the decrease of the dependent stipend for program participants. After lengthy debate, a motion was made by Vernon Davis to amend language regarding the child stipend to read,

**“Young Adults Receiving the Minor Dependent Stipend**

The B2i Advisory Committee made the recommendation for the determination of the rate to be paid for a minor dependent child stipend to be researched and evaluated by the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee of the Nebraska Children’s Commission. This was discussed at the January 17, 2018 Nebraska Children’s Commission meeting where this recommendation was not approved. It was decided by DHHS-DCFS to adjust the rates based on the Nebraska FC Pay rate structure outlined in 479 NAC Chapter 2.

The current DHHS-DCFS 395 NAC Chapter 10 Bridge to Independence Rules and Regulations do not include provisions for a minor dependent child of a Bridge to Independence young adult to receive a stipend. The decision made by DHHS-DCFS was not reflective of the B2i Advisory Committee’s recommendation to evaluate the appropriate rate within the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee.

As of January 2018, the B2i stipend and dependent child stipend were based on Nebraska’s foster care maintenance payments, using the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility tool and set by DHHS. This stipend amount had been under the consideration of DHHS to recognize the current General Funds shortfall, remain in line with other Nebraska support programs, and reflect best practices identified by other states. DHHS has since adjusted the amount of the Minor Dependent Stipend to the former Nebraska Foster Care Pay “FC Pay” minimum rate effective May 24, 2018. This B2i Advisory Committee will continue to monitor the impact of this change.”

The motion was seconded by Nathan Collier. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (12):**

Whitney Beck	Brandy Gustoff	Jennifer Skala
Nathan Collier	Sarah Helvey	Juliet Summers
Vernon Davis	Doug Lenz	Susan Thomas
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (1):**

Alyson Goedken

**ABSENT (3):**

Jodie Austin	Jill Schubauer	Deb Shuck
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**MOTION CARRIED**

The final motion came from Brandy Gustoff to approve the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee 2018 annual report with amendments based on the previous motions as well as the following alterations as discussed in the meeting:

- Updating the legislative update section to state that the B2i Advisory Committee should continue as a statutory body. Additional statutory language should be created to provide a mechanism for the Committee to continue should the Commission sunset on June 30, 2019.
- Revision of the language in the section pertaining to the population of young adults in the incapable category. Language should be expanded to reflect the workgroup’s efforts of review and their determination that the eligibility category continue as is, in order to continue to meet the needs of this population.
- Elimination of the second sentence in the section entitled, “Young Adults with Mental Health or Behavioral Health Needs.”
- Making note that the Committee intended to delve into issues of extended guardianship and adoption programs in the next year.

The motion was seconded by Jennifer Skala. Discussion included an agreement that a copy of the final document would be sent out to members with the proposed changes prior to the meeting of the Nebraska Children’s Commission on July 31, 2018. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (12):**

Whitney Beck  
Nathan Collier  
Vernon Davis  
Mary Fraser Meints

Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey  
Doug Lenz  
Mary Jo Pankoke

Jennifer Skala  
Juliet Summers  
Susan Thomas  
Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (1):**

Alyson Goedken

**ABSENT (3):**

Jodie Austin

Jill Schubauer

Deb Shuck

**MOTION CARRIED**

**XI. Public Comment**

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The Co-Chairs welcomed public comment from the many guests in attendance. Mary Ann Harvey, Project Specialist with the Nebraska Court Improvement Project (CIP), informed members that the ADC rate is based on a rate of 55% of what the cost of raising a child would entail. She also noted that there was a lifetime utilization cap of 5 years, which should also be taken into consideration.

**X. New Business**

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Doug Lenz inquired as to the procedure of adding new members to Workgroups of the Committee. It was clarified that so long as a workgroup did not exceed a quorum of the Committee, members were welcome to participate in workgroups. Brandy Gustoff and Lana Verbrigghe expressed interest in joining the Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup. Amanda Felton indicated that their additions would not cause the workgroup to reach a Committee quorum and that she would add them to the member roster and mailing list.

**XI. Upcoming Meeting Planning**

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Co-Chair Pankoke stated that a doodle poll would go out to members to find a date for the next Committee meeting which would likely fall in September or October.

**XII. Adjourn**

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The meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m.

06/21/2018

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