

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

January 2018

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

All children need supportive relationships, life skills, and community connections to reach their career, education, and life goals. Nebraska and its economy benefit when children and youth grow up to enter the workforce and raise healthy families. When children need to be removed from homes and families due to abuse and neglect, they face many challenges to maintain healthy family relationships, continue their education, and enter the workforce. This is especially true for children who become legal adults without achieving reunification with their families, being adopted, or entering into guardianships.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) administers the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Program to support young adults exiting the child welfare system without permanency to reach their goals. The B2i Advisory Committee is charged by statute to make recommendations to DHHS and the Children's Commission about the ongoing implementation of the B2i program. The B2i Advisory Committee's 2017 Annual Report identified duplicative services for young adults enrolled in the B2i Program, changes to eligibility and eligibility categories, coordinating and providing feedback on an external evaluation of the B2i Program, and the DHHS Continuous Quality Improvement process as areas for further work. The Advisory Committee has continued meeting to work on these topics, and submits the recommendations in this report for the improvement and sustainability of the B2i Program.

DUPLICATIVE SERVICES FOR YOUNG ADULTS ENROLLED IN THE B2I PROGRAM

YOUNG ADULTS RECEIVING HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES (HCBS) WAIVER FUNDING AND SERVICES

All young adults deserve necessary support to transition to a healthy and successful adulthood. Some of these young adults also have developmental disability needs and are eligible for both the B2i program and the Developmental Disability Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver. In order to ensure that these young adults are able to reach their full potential and participate in their communities, a careful analysis was undertaken of the services and funding sources of each program.

IMPACT OF B2I PAYMENTS FOR FORMER WARDS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Legislative Fiscal Analyst Liz Hruska prepared the following information:

Persons residing in a licensed center for the developmentally disabled are only allowed to retain \$60 a month. The balance of their income offsets the cost of their care. Bridge to Independence payments are either General funds or a combination of General funds and IV-E. For former wards with developmental disabilities covered by Medicaid, the amount above \$60 would offset costs at approximately 47% General and 53% federal. If the Bridge payment is from General Funds only, 53% offsets the federal Medicaid payment. If the payment is from General and IV-E funds, there is a net zero impact, i.e. the fund source for the B2i payment is the same as the Medicaid. Additionally, the young adult should qualify for Social Security benefits which is also applied to offset Medicaid General and federal costs. [Neb. Rev. Stat. §68-1006.01]

Recommendation 1: Young Adults enrolled in the Bridge to Independence program and whose residence is paid for by Medicaid under a HCBS Waiver will not receive a Bridge to Independence stipend.

SERVICE COORDINATION FOR FORMER WARDS RECEIVING HCBS WAIVER SERVICES

The attached B2i and Comprehensive Developmental Disability Waiver Walk Through compares the services and case management provided by each program. Although there may be overlapping services between the two programs, each has different purposes and goals for the young adult enrolled. Services under each program are highly individualized; so many young adults need the unique services and benefits that are available from both programs. Each individual will have different needs, and the below recommendation allows for responsible and coordinated support.

Recommendation 2: Young adults in the Bridge to Independence Program who are receiving services paid for by Medicaid under a HCBS waiver will receive case management that is coordinated across the two programs. A structured process will be developed to ensure these young adults access the needed services. An assessment will be undertaken to understand the needs of the young adult. A plan will be created based on this assessment to ensure access to needed services and case management without any duplicative services.

MITIGATING THE “CLIFF EFFECT” AND ELIMINATING DUPLICATION IN PUBLIC BENEFITS

It is essential that young adults build a strong and stable foundation for adulthood. The B2i program exists to provide this foundation for young adults who are without families or a support network. The 2017 Annual Report of the B2i Advisory Committee noted concerns regarding the “cliff effect” that may occur when the youth exits the B2i Program at age 21. The cliff effect can be especially destabilizing when a young adult is receiving other necessary benefits and services that may be impacted by the B2i stipend or asset limitations if the young adult has tried to begin building a safety net by investing or saving their B2i stipend money. This can be mitigated through case management, thoughtful use of existing programs, and providing information to young adults about available benefits and services. Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are an existing program that can establish economic self-sufficiency in young adults. IDAs are special bank accounts that encourage

savings, investment, and asset accumulation for low-income individuals and families by matching savings for first homes, education, or small businesses.

Recommendation 3: Young Adults receive assistance in navigating existing public benefits programs to meet their needs and prevent duplication of services, including information about the impact of Bridge to Independence stipends on program eligibility and assistance opening savings accounts that protect the money they save from their Bridge to Independence stipend, including the possibility of opening an IDA.

Recommendation 4: Incentivize savings and mitigate the cliff effect by connecting young adults to savings matching programs, protected savings accounts, and IDAs.

YOUNG ADULTS RECEIVING THE MINOR DEPENDENT STIPEND

The 2017 Annual report of the B2i Advisory Committee identified the need to coordinate services and eliminate the duplication of services for young adults who are pregnant and parenting. The B2i Advisory Committee set a goal to explore the structure of B2i stipends for pregnant and parenting young adults who also receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to best support Nebraska's families and reduce the "cliff effect" when young adults leave the B2i Program. 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. Support to families must be coordinated to achieve maximum benefit so that all young adults and children can reach their full potential.

The current B2i stipend and dependent 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, remain in line with other Nebraska support programs, and reflect best practices identified by other states. DHHS has indicated its current recommendation is the following: *Adjust the amount of the Minor Dependent Stipend to be in line with the TANF rate based on household size. A six-month step down will be implemented for young adults receiving the stipend at its current amount.*

A careful analysis of the stipend amount is necessary, and the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission is the appropriate body to make this determination.

Recommendation 5: The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee 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.

CHANGES TO ELIGIBILITY AND ELIGIBILITY CATEGORIES

YOUNG ADULTS WHO ARE INCAPABLE OF PARTICIPATING IN EITHER THE EMPLOYMENT OR EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY PROGRAMS

This eligibility category is defined as a young adult who is incapable of completing secondary education or an equivalency program, enrolled in a postsecondary or vocational education institution, employed for at least 80 hours a month, or participating in a program designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment, due to a medical condition. Many may receive services through HCBS Waiver or may be eligible to receive case management services through a care coordinator employed by a Managed Care Organization (MCO).

Recommendation 6: The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee’s Finance and Policy Workgroup will undertake a thorough analysis of the young adults who are served through the eligibility category of being “incapable of participating in either the employment or eligibility programs” and understand how they are incapable. The Workgroup will create recommendations on this subject before the next meeting of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee in 2018.

YOUNG ADULTS WHO ARE PARTICIPATING IN A PROGRAM ACTIVITY DESIGNED TO PROMOTE EMPLOYMENT OR REMOVE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Understanding the young adults in this population is especially important, as they have been identified as needing additional support to enter the workforce. These young adults may have unmet needs, and more in depth examination is needed to understand why young adults enter on this eligibility category, how long they stay in this category, and what is needed to help move them to employment.

Recommendation 7: The Finance and Policy Workgroup will collect feedback from young adults who have been served in the Bridge to Independence Program while participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment, and the Independence Coordinators and stakeholders that serve and support these youth, and examine data on this population. The Workgroup will create recommendations on this eligibility category before the next meeting of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee in 2018.

YOUNG ADULTS RESIDING OUTSIDE OF NEBRASKA

Young adults in the B2i program have accessed many exciting opportunities for travel, including study abroad, military stations, and supportive family members who live outside the state of Nebraska. This poses a challenge for the B2i program, as Independence Coordinators need to meet with the young adults for compliance with Title IV-E. Additionally, Independence Coordinators may be unfamiliar with the services and community resources available in that state, and have difficulty connecting the youth to needed resources. The Finance and Policy Workgroup will continue to explore options for this population, including courtesy supervision through the Interstate Compact on the placement of Children (ICPC) or Chafee services.

Recommendation 8: The Finance and Policy Workgroup will collect feedback from young adults who have moved out of state on the Bridge to Independence Program and the Independence Coordinators and stakeholders that serve and support these youth and examine data related to this population. The Workgroup will create recommendations on this subject before the next meeting of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee in 2018.

EVALUATION AND DATA COLLECTION WORKGROUP

The 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.

COORDINATING AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

DHHS-CFS, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) and the Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) have begun the process of designing an external evaluation for the B2i 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 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 9: The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee supports these questions as a foundation to guide the Bridge to Independence Program Evaluation.

EVALUATION COORDINATION

The current evaluation proposal has identified three components 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 10: Task 1, Outcome Analysis and Data Consultation, is a necessary first step to defining outcomes and establishing a sustainable framework for data analysis of the Bridge to Independence 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.

EVALUATION AND DATA COLLECTION WORKGROUP COMMITTEE ROLE IN EVALUATION

The Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup and B2i Advisory Committee will continue to provide comments and feedback on the progress of the evaluation. The groups 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 B2i Program. This data is run on a monthly basis and examined 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 by the Workgroup. The Workgroup will continue to review this data and support DHHS in its CQI process.

Recommendation 11: The Evaluation and Data Collection 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 Bridge to Independence program are accessing;
3. Number of entries; and
4. Total number of young adults 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 DHHS-Division of Children and Family Services 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 12: 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.

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 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 13: 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 B2i 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 14: The Workgroup will continue to provide comments and feedback on the FCRO Bridge to Independence case review process.

Bridge to Independence and Comprehensive Developmental Disabilities Waiver Walk Through

	Bridge to Independence Program	Comprehensive Developmental Disabilities Waiver
Federal Authorization	Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act	§1915(c) of the Social Security Act 42 U.S.C. 1396n §1915(c)
State Statute	Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4501 to 43-4514	Neb. Rev. Stat. §83-1202 to 83-1227
Advisory Body	Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee	Advisory Committee on Developmental Disabilities; Nebraska Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities
Legislative Intent	The purpose of the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act is to support former state wards in transitioning to adulthood, becoming self-sufficient, and creating permanent relationships. The bridge to independence program shall at all times recognize and respect the autonomy of the young adult. Nothing in the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act shall be construed to abrogate any other rights that a person who has attained nineteen years of age may have as an adult under state law.	It is the intent of the Legislature that: (1) All persons with developmental disabilities shall receive services and assistance which present opportunities to increase their independence, productivity, and integration into the community; (2) All persons with developmental disabilities shall have access to a full array of services appropriate for them as individuals; (3) All persons with developmental disabilities shall have a right to live, work, and recreate with people who are not disabled; (4) All persons with developmental disabilities shall be served in their communities and should only be served by specialized programs when their needs cannot be met through general services available to all persons, including those without disabilities; (5) All persons with developmental disabilities shall have the right to receive age-appropriate services consistent with their individual needs, potentials, and abilities; (6) All persons with developmental disabilities shall be afforded the same rights, dignity, and respect as members of society who are not disabled; and (7) Persons who deliver services to persons with developmental disabilities shall be assured a uniform system of compensation and training and a full range of work-site enhancements which attract and retain qualified employees
State Regulation	395 NAC 10	Title 202 NAC 1; Title 207 NAC 1; and Title 404 NAC
Nebraska Residency Requirement	No	Yes
Open Court Docket	Yes, docket remains open for youth to have review hearings with Judge	No open court docket to address specifically waiver services. Individual may file a petition for a judicial review after conclusion of the Developmental Disabilities hearing process (Neb. Rev. Stat. §83-1224)
Review	Foster Care Review Office conducts reviews every six months. A FCRO staff member does a paper file review as well as contacting or attempting to contact the young adult. This review includes data collection, advocacy for the young adult, and recommendations for systemic improvement.	
Funding	General Funds and Title IV-E	General Funds and Medicaid
Medicaid Payment	Medicaid does not pay for B2i Services, although young adults may apply to Medicaid.	Medicaid pays for DD services under home and community-based services (HCBS) Waivers.

	Bridge to Independence Program	Comprehensive Developmental Disabilities Waiver
Eligibility	<p>The bridge to independence program is available, on a voluntary basis, to a young adult: (1) Who has attained at least nineteen years of age; (2) Who was adjudicated to be a juvenile described in subdivision (3)(a) of section 43-247 or the equivalent under tribal law and (a) upon attaining nineteen years of age, was in an out-of-home placement or had been discharged to independent living or (b) with respect to whom a kinship guardianship assistance agreement was in effect pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 673 if the young adult had attained sixteen years of age before the agreement became effective or with respect to whom a state-funded guardianship assistance agreement was in effect if the young adult had attained sixteen years of age before the agreement became effective; and (3) Who is:</p> <p>(a) Completing secondary education or an educational program leading to an equivalent credential; (b) Enrolled in an institution which provides postsecondary or vocational education; (c) Employed for at least eighty hours per month; (d) Participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment; or (e) Incapable of doing any of the activities described in subdivisions (3)(a) through (d) of this section due to a medical condition, which incapacity is supported by regularly updated information in the case plan of the young adult.</p>	<p>To be eligible for DD Services, an applicant must (1) Be a citizen of the United States of America or a qualified aliens under the federal immigration and Nationality Act and be lawfully present in the United States; (2) Be a resident of the State of Nebraska; (3) Have a developmental disability.</p> <p>To be eligible for the waiver, the applicant must: (1) Submit an application; (2) Be eligible for Medicaid in accordance with 477 NAC; (3) Meet the definition of a developmental disability as determined by the Department in accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat. §83-1205; (4) Meet institutional level of care criteria initially and annually thereafter; (5) Elect to receive Medicaid home and community based waiver services as an alternative to institutional placement; (6) Have a physical health screen within the past 12 months and annual thereafter; and (7) Accept Service Coordination service.</p> <p>Developmental disability, as defined in Neb. Rev. Stat. § 83-1205, means: a severe, chronic disability, including an intellectual disability, other than mental illness, which:</p> <p>(1) Is attributable to a mental or physical impairment unless the impairment is solely attributable to a severe emotional disturbance or persistent mental illness; (2) Is manifested before the age of twenty-two years; (3) Is likely to continue indefinitely; (4) Results in substantial functional limitations in one of each of the following areas of adaptive functioning: (a) Conceptual skills, including language, literacy, money, time, number concepts, and self-direction; (b) Social skills, including interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, wariness, social problem solving, and the ability to follow laws and rules and to avoid being victimized; and (c) Practical skills, including activities of daily living, personal care, occupational skills, healthcare, mobility, and the capacity for independent living; and (5) Reflects the individual's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, individualized supports, or other forms of assistance that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated.</p> <p>An individual from birth through the age of nine years inclusive who has a substantial developmental delay or specific congenital or acquired condition may be considered to have a developmental disability without meeting three or more of the major life activities described in subdivision (4) of this section if the individual, without services and support, has a high probability of meeting those criteria later in life.</p>

	Bridge to Independence Program	Comprehensive Developmental Disabilities Waiver
Waitlist	No waitlist for eligible young adults currently	Yes (Priority Waitlist as per Neb. Rev. Stat. §83-1216): (4) The priorities for funding the Medicaid home and community-based services waivers under this section are as follows: (a) The first funding priority of the state shall be responding to the needs of persons with developmental disabilities in immediate crisis due to caregiver death, homelessness, or a threat to the life and safety of the person; (b) The second funding priority of the state in responding to the needs of persons with developmental disabilities shall be for persons that have resided in an institutional setting for a period of at least twelve consecutive months and who are requesting community-based services; (c) The third funding priority of the state in responding to the needs of persons with developmental disabilities shall be for serving wards of the department or persons placed under the supervision of the Office of Probation Administration by the Nebraska court system who are transitioning upon age nineteen with no other alternatives as determined by the department to support residential services necessary to pursue economic self-sufficiency; (d) The fourth funding priority of the state in responding to the needs of persons with developmental disabilities shall be for serving persons transitioning from the education system upon attaining twenty-one years of age to maintain skills and receive the day services necessary to pursue economic self-sufficiency; and (e) The fifth funding priority of the state in responding to the needs of persons with developmental disabilities shall be for serving all other persons by date of application.
Grievance Process	Yes	Yes Neb. Rev. Stat. §83-1219 A person with developmental disabilities or his or her parent or guardian may initiate a hearing on matters related to the initiation, change, or termination of or the refusal to initiate, change, or terminate the determination of eligibility for specialized services or the evaluation or placement of the person or the provision of specialized services or records relating thereto. A copy of the procedures specified in rules and regulations of the department for complaints and hearings under this section shall be provided to such persons who are receiving specialized services or their parents or guardians. The hearing shall be initiated by filing a petition with the department.
Income Limits	No	No. A person who does not qualify for Medicaid may have an Ability to Pay for DD services, as outlined in Title 202 NAC.
Pay for Services	No. The youth is provided a stipend, and the Independence Coordinator connects the youth to resources in the community to meet the needs of the youth. The young adult is responsible for any premiums, copayment, share of costs, or other costs relating to accessing services.	Yes. An objective needs assessment is completed. Assessment results are translated into an Individual Budget Amount (IBA), which is the annual amount a participant may use to purchase DD services.

	Bridge to Independence Program	Comprehensive Developmental Disabilities Waiver
Case Management	Yes – provided by an Independence Coordinator. Case management is defined as “support provided by the Department to a young adult to complement his/her own efforts towards self-sufficiency.” 395 NAC 10-002. As per statute this may include assisting the youth to access resources to obtain employment, identification, bank services, juvenile court sealing, secondary education, vocational and post secondary education, apply for immigration relief, create a health care power of attorney or health care proxy, obtain health and education records, apply for public benefits and assistance, maintain relationships with individuals who are important to the young adult, including searching for individuals, access information about relatives, access young adult empowerment opportunities, and access pregnancy and parent resources and services.	Yes – provided by a Service Coordinator. Services coordination is defined as “activities conducted on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to help them access developmental disability services and other services not funded by the Department. Service coordination ensures that services are responsive to the preferences and needs of the individual and that services promote the independence, interdependence, productivity, and inclusion of individuals receiving services. In Nebraska’s home and community-based waivers for persons with developmental disabilities, service coordination is referred to as case management.” 404 NAC 2 A Service Coordinator will: Work directly to develop a service plan based on wants and needs; Complete referrals for DD agency providers and assist with visits and transition plans; Help preferred DD independent provider to enroll; Help access services not funded by DD, such as Medicaid, SSI, and SNAP; Help identify and access community resources; Hold meetings every six months, at a minimum, to help participants work toward life goals; Complete monitoring of the plan to ensure implementation and adequately addressed needs; Follow up with participant to ensure needs are being met; Follow up with any legal representative and, as requested, family; Adjust service plan and services when changes are necessary for success; Help advocate for what the participant wants and needs from service provider(s), family, and community; and •Ensure services promote independence, productivity, and inclusion.
Team	Independence Coordinator and individuals of the young adult’s choice.	Individual Support Plan Team is coordinated by the Service Coordinator. The Team includes the participant, Service Coordinator, any DD providers whose services are used, and the guardian, if applicable. The participant can also invite any other family, friends, or organizations who support them.
Contact with Case Manager	In person meeting every thirty days	Service coordination must have a billable contact at least monthly with each participant.
Employment Services	Not provided by the program, IC can connect young adult with resources	Yes, in addition to connecting participants to resources. All DD participants must apply for and use benefits from Vocational Rehabilitation, when eligible. DD day services focus on finding employment and increasing skills needed to join the workforce. Services include prevocational services, supported employment, habilitative workshops, and habilitative community inclusion.
Medicaid Services	A young adult who is enrolled in the B2i Program will receive medical assistance through Nebraska Medicaid, if eligible. IC can assist young adult with applying for Medicaid	To help maximize federal funding, all DD participants must apply for and accept federal Medicaid benefits. When necessary, a Service Coordinator can assist a participant with applying for Medicaid. Service Coordination will also assist a participant to maintain Medicaid by taking actions upon receiving an alert that Medicaid will be lost for any reason.
Requirement to Apply for other Services	No	Yes - “It is the intent of the Legislature that the department take all possible steps to maximize federal funding. All Nebraska residents eligible for funding for specialized services through the department shall apply for and accept any federal Medicaid benefits for which they may be eligible and benefits from other funding sources within the department, the State Department of Education, specifically including the Division of Rehabilitation Services, and other agencies to the maximum extent possible.” Neb. Rev. Stat. §83-1216
Stipend for Individual	Yes. Financial support is provided in the form of continued foster care maintenance payments.	No

	Bridge to Independence Program	Comprehensive Developmental Disabilities Waiver
Stipend for Dependents	Yes	No
Residence Payment	No	No – DD does not pay for room and board. DD may pay for residential services provided to help participants learn independent living skills and increase access to the community. Residential services may occur in a participant’s own home or apartment, family home, or a provide-operated location.
Assessment	National Youth in Transition Database	Needs are assessed using the ICF/DD level of care criteria. An objective assessment is also used to determine DD funding amount.
Services Provided	Case management, monthly meetings, court hearings, Foster Care Review Office Reviews, connection to resources, stipend.	Developmental Disabilities provides Service Coordination to coordinate and oversee the delivery of effective services. The following DD services are approved to be paid to providers: Adult Companion Service; Adult Day Services; Assistive Technology; Consultative Assessment Service; Crisis Intervention Support ; Environmental Modification Assessment ; Habilitative Community Inclusion; Habilitative Workshop; Home Modifications; Homemaker Services; In-Home Residential Habilitation; Personal Emergency Response System (PERS); Prevocational Services; Residential Habilitation; Respite Service; Supported Employment – Enclave; Supported Employment – Follow Along; Supported Employment – Individual; Transitional Services; and Transportation.

DRAFT

Evaluation of Nebraska's Extension of Foster Care - Bridge to Independence Program

Proposal Submitted to:

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December 8, 2017



Child Trends is pleased to submit this proposal to the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCF). NCF and Nebraska Department of Children and Families Services (DCFS) are seeking to answer several important questions related to its Bridge to Independence (b2i) program, specifically:

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?

After considering several evaluation design options, and after discussions with DCFS, NCF asked Child Trends to submit a proposal to: (1) conduct analyses using NYTD, OPPS, CYI and other datasets to assess outcomes of young adults in Nebraska's extended care program or young adults eligible for the program, and provide consultation to DCFS and NCF on use of the data; (2) conduct focus groups with young people participating in the b2i program, as well as young people no longer in the program; and (3) develop a framework for states to use as a guide to assess their extended care programs.

Below we provide a detailed task plan for the proposed work.

Task 1. Outcome Analysis and Data Consultation

Budget: \$25,000-50,000

Period of Performance: December 2017 – May 2018

Child Trends will obtain access to Nebraska-specific datasets (NYTD, OPPS, CYI, and Foster Care Review Board) and conduct preliminary analyses to determine the extent to which the datasets can inform the research questions and subsequent tasks in our work. Our first step will be to work with DCFS and NCF to develop a data sharing agreement which will outline the purpose and details regarding access and restrictions, including disclosure, confidentiality, and retention. After executing the agreement, Child Trends will gain access to the data files and schedule frequent calls with key NCF and DCFS staff to gain insight into the data and develop an analysis plan. Child Trends will submit a memorandum to NCF and DCFS which will detail the analysis plan, provide a timeline for the analyses, and estimate any additional budget needs (late January/early February 2018).

Throughout this task, Child Trends will serve in a consultative role as DCFS and other departments move toward integrating data across systems to design a rigorous evaluation of extended care services and supports and to develop a plan for assessing long-term outcomes for b2i participants.

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

Period of Performance: May – December 2018

Budget: \$57,500

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. Following data collection, we will analyze the data to draw out important themes and recommendations for NCFE.

We provide a task plan below.

Subtask 1. Protocol Development (May – June 2018)

The first step in the research will be for the team to develop a data collection protocol for use during focus groups with young people, as well as a plan to recruit study participants. The following activities are included in this task:

- **Develop data collection protocol for use during focus groups with young people.** Using results from the outcome analyses conducted in Task 1 to inform our work, we will develop drafts of the focus group protocol and seek input from NCFE prior to submitting to the Institutional Review Board (IRB).
- **Develop plan to recruit focus group participants.** The recruitment plan is an important component of the study and our submission to the IRB. The plan must ensure voluntary participation yet also include strategies for achieving a high level of participation. In each local office in the four selected sites, young adults will be asked to participate in focus groups. We will work with NCFE to identify the best methods for recruiting the groups of young people in each site. The plan will include details such as language for NCFE to embed in email invitations to the prospective participants. We will also discuss the type of incentives, as well as food and refreshments, that will be provided to focus group participants.

Subtask 2. Institutional Review Board Approval (July 2018)

The team will then submit the focus group protocols and recruitment materials to Child Trends' IRB for approval. Once we receive IRB approval, we will implement the recruitment plan and start data collection. Any substantive modifications to the data collection protocols and recruitment plan will need to be reviewed and approved by the IRB.

Subtask 3. Focus Groups (August – September 2018)

Focus groups will be conducted with young people in four communities. The following activities are included:

- **Coordinate with NCFE staff to identify communities in which to conduct the focus groups.** We will work closely with NCFE to identify four communities that will highlight cross-state differences and provide a diverse group of young people from which to recruit focus group participants.

- **Implement the recruitment plan to recruit young people for the focus groups.** We will rely primarily on NCFE staff to recruit participants and schedule the focus groups; however, we will coordinate with NCFE on development of the recruitment materials and scheduling of the groups. Ideally, 10-12 young people will participate in each of the groups.
- **Conduct focus groups with youth participants.** A two-person team will conduct two focus groups in each of the four sites (one group comprised of youth participating in b2i or other extended care activities and the other group with youth no longer participating or who never participated in extended care services). One research team member serves as the facilitator of the focus group while the other takes detailed notes (which are critical to analyzing the data). If the participants agree, Child Trends will record the focus groups to supplement the notes. We may transcribe the recordings if the notes are not adequate.

Subtask 4. Data Analysis, Reports, and Dissemination (October - December 2018)

The final task is to analyze the data and develop final products. After completion of each focus group, notes will be entered in qualitative content analysis program (NVivo or Dedoose). Child Trends team members will use the program to facilitate the analysis process following these steps: 1) an initial round of affixing codes to written data; 2) placing notes about inferences in the electronic records; 3) sorting data into similar and contrasting patterns; 4) incorporating the patterns into evaluation themes; and 5) developing the themes. The analytic process begins during the focus groups when the facilitator (and notetaker) listens for inconsistent, vague, or cryptic comments, and probes for additional details. The two-person team allows for debriefing immediately following each focus group, noting themes, hunches, interpretations, and ideas. They then compare and contrast the focus groups with others they conduct. The team will establish the first round of codes prior to data collection based on the research questions and protocol outlines. We will then refine and revise the codes during the first and subsequent rounds of analysis. We will consider the following seven elements: words; context; internal consistency; frequency or extensiveness; intensity; specificity; and finding big ideas.

We will develop a memorandum and slide deck presenting the findings from the focus groups and submit the products to NCFE.

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

Budget: \$30,000

Period of Performance: October – December 2018

Child Trends will 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. Recent federal policy changes have allowed states to extend foster care for young adults until age 21. To date, about half of states elected to do so using federal IV-E funds, while nearly all states extend care to at least some youth using state funds. While some states have years of experience implementing their extended care program, other states are just underway. Extended care programs vary considerably in the criteria for eligibility, stipends and other supports and services offered, and, most importantly, the outcomes for young people participating in the programs. As of now, there is no national repository of this information and no framework for states interested in examining how the youth in their programs are faring.

Learning from the research efforts in Nebraska will enable Child Trends to refine the framework providing guidance to other states around how to track and measure implementation, how to leverage

existing survey and administrative data to understand utilization of extended care, strategies for understanding outcomes for youth in and out of extended foster care, and steps needed to poise states for a rigorous evaluation. Both a written toolkit and corresponding webinar could be produced to disseminate the framework and encourage its use by states to plan for assessment of their extended care programs.

BUDGET

TASK	BUDGET
Task 1. Outcome Analysis and Data Consultation	\$25,000-50,000
Task 2. Focus Groups with Young People in Nebraska	\$57,500
Task 3. Develop Framework for State Assessment of Extended Care	\$30,000
TOTAL	\$112,500-137,500