

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

December 16, 2022

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Webex

and

Lincoln Community Foundation

215 Centennial Mall South (5<sup>th</sup> Floor Large Conference Room)

Lincoln, NE 68508

**I. Call to Order and Welcome**

Co-Chair Brandy Gustoff called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 10:36 a.m., and asked Adam Anderson to call roll

**II. Roll Call and Introductions**

***Committee Members present (8):***

Sarah Helvey

Michaela Hirschman

Proxy for Jill Holt, Kitty Washburn (11:00 a.m.)

Jovan Johnson

Felipe Longoria

Bailey Perry

Proxy for Sara Riffel, Keenan Page

Susan Thomas

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

Douglas Beck

Whitney Beck

Christina Lloyd

***Ex-Officio Members present (2):***

Brandy Gustoff

Lindsay Meyer

***Ex-Officio Members absent (3):***

Maghan Madsen

Jennifer Skala

Deb VanDyke-Ries

**A quorum was present.**

***Guests In Attendance (10):***

Amanda Adams.....Nebraska Children’s Commission

Adam Anderson.....Nebraska Children’s Commission

Deanna Brakhage.....Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Mary Fraser Meints.....Sustainability Workgroup

Keenan Page.....Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Shayne Schiermeister.....Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Kitty Washburn.....Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition

Heather Wood.....Foster Care Review Office

Lana Verbrigghe.....Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Terrence Williams.....Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

a. *Notice of Publication*

Recorder for the meeting, Adam Anderson, 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 at the sign in table and on the Nebraska Children's Commission website.

\*Minutes do not follow the order of the agenda.

### III. Approval of Agenda

**It was moved by Sarah Helvey and seconded by Jovan Johnson to approve the agenda with correction to the date.** There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (7):**

Sarah Helvey  
Michaela Hirschman  
Jovan Johnson  
Felipe Longoria

Bailey Perry  
Proxy for Sara Riffel, Keenan Page  
Susan Thomas

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (4):**

Douglas Beck  
Whitney Beck

Proxy for Jill Holt, Kitty Washburn  
Christina Lloyd

**MOTION CARRIED**

### IV. Approval of Minutes

**It was moved by Sarah Helvey to approve the August 11, 2022 minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Susan Thomas.** There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (7):**

Sarah Helvey  
Michaela Hirschman  
Jovan Johnson  
Felipe Longoria

Bailey Perry  
Proxy for Sara Riffel, Keenan Page  
Susan Thomas

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (4):**

Douglas Beck

Whitney Beck

## **MOTION CARRIED**

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

Brandy Gustoff noted an upcoming DHHS hearing regarding regulations. Deanna Brakhage provided an update regarding the upcoming hearing and noted that DHHS would propose changes to remove duplicate statutory language, update definitions, eligibility and citizenship requirements that match statute.

### **VI. Membership Update**

Adam Anderson shared an update regarding membership. He noted the B2i Committee is looking for a member from a federally recognized Indian tribe residing in Nebraska and young adults currently or previously in foster care.

### **VII. Youth Thrive Survey and Discussion**

Amanda Adams provided an update regarding Youth Thrive Survey implementation at DHHS. She noted no current changes in plans to move forward with Youth Thrive from what was previously discussed. Adams will reach out to Sarah or Crystal with NCFE to provide a presentation on the survey.

### **VIII. Workgroup Updates**

#### **a. Sustainability Workgroup**

Amanda Adams provided information regarding direct cash transfers to youth, and some of the results from that research. Members spoke about potential upcoming legislation that would be reintroduced from last year.

Susan Thomas discussed Angel Share; a program with funding from a legislative bill last year that utilized ARPA funds

#### **b. Data & Evaluation Workgroup**

Heather Wood discussed the recent work of the workgroup. She noted that the workgroup is awaiting results from CCFL and CFS. Adam Anderson will send out a Doodle poll to reconvene the workgroup in 2023.

Heather Wood shared a PowerPoint from the Foster Care Review Office Special Report and provided an overview of the data and results. She discussed that the FCRO conducts reviews of cases from questionnaires provided by the Independence Coordinators, input from the guardian ad litem, county attorneys or anyone that chooses to participate in the surveys. She noted that the FCRO reviews the youth's progress towards independent living. Wood noted that the FCRO conducted 200 reviews in fiscal year 2021, and she provided the top goals that were identified most frequently. She provided information regarding the progress towards each identified goal. Terrence Williams provided clarification regarding goal selection, progress, and how goals are assessed. Members discussed sound data to back up the anecdotal evidence.

Wood provided data showing a youth's progress towards goal completion as it relates to the number of placements that youth has had throughout their time in care. She noted a threshold of 10 or more placements showing effects on goal progression.

Wood continued by discussion data regarding education, financial literacy, and independent living skills. She noted that education goals are not strictly regarding bachelor's level education, but also include GED, trade, or post-secondary education.

During the presentation, Shayne Schiermeister shared that Independence Coordinators are accepting cases of court-involved youth, where that youth is at least 18 years old and with the goal of independent

living. He noted that the ICs are simply accepting cases earlier than what had traditionally been standard practice. Lana Verbrigghe added that there are 19 youth that are identified with this criteria.

#### **IX. DHHS Update**

Shayne Schiermeister shared that DHHS is working on a specialized unit that will be working with youth to help better transition into B2i. Schiermeister continued by noting 207 youth currently enrolled in B2i, and caseloads are ranging anywhere from 13 to 23. Schiermeister responded to a question regarding lower enrolment levels by noting that changes to criteria and statute over time has dropped numbers, specifically for youth that were qualified for DD services now being ineligible for B2i. He stated that those youth are better served with DD than B2i. He shared that enrolment has been stable over the last year. Deanna Brakhage shared that she will look at number of youth that are exiting foster care at age 19 so the Committee can have a better sense of how many youth are choosing not to enter B2i.

Schiermeister shared that as DHHS prepares to move forward with Youth Thrive, training will be upcoming in April. He noted that DHHS will also be holding a B2i roundtable discussion at the end of January to receive feedback from current or former participants.

Mary Fraser Meints shared a scenario regarding a youth at risk of homelessness who was denied consultation until 6 months prior to aging out of foster care. She noted that prior conversation regarding program criteria was that youth were to be consulted at a minimum of 6 months prior to exiting foster care, but that consultation can be had prior to 6 months. Fraser Meints offered to have discussions regarding this scenario offline. Brakhage and Schiermeister encouraged members to reach out to them if they hear of cases like this happening in the future so they may look into it. Terrence Williams shared that he will be visiting offices to provide informal training regarding engagement and looking at unique situations to discuss options for youth approaching age 19.

Deanna Brakhage provided an update regarding a B2i video discussed at a previous meeting. She noted that the video is an interview-style video where two youth talk about their experiences with and the purpose of B2i.

#### **X. Public Comment**

Crystal Aldmeyer shared that Connected Youth Initiative is an available resource to provide coaching, Opportunity Passport and leadership. CYI is available to youth even before they are eligible for B2i. Keenan Page shared in the chat that Opportunity Passport is a key resource for financial literacy. Felipe Longoria shared that the \$6000 match has risen to an \$8000 with the Opportunity Passport program. He noted that anyone who has met the previous match can return and take advantage as of October 1, 2022.

#### **XI. New Business**

Brandy Gustoff shared that, as of January 1, 2023, the Omaha Home for Boys is no longer funded by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. She shared that the Independent Living Program has been downsized and the program will have the opportunity to focus on youth that may need a little more assistance or targeted services. She noted that changes should happen by mid-February, 2023.

#### **XII. Upcoming Meetings:**

- a. February 21, 2023

#### **XIII. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 12:01 p.m.