

STATUTORY GROUPS

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee

Brandy Gustoff and Richard Hasty, Co-Chairs

This Committee was created pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513](#) to make recommendations to DHHS and the Commission regarding the Bridge to Independence (b2i) Program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance. This Committee, currently co-chaired by Brandy Gustoff, has been active since 2012.

The B2i Program, implemented in October of 2014, was created to support youth who age out of the child welfare foster care system without achieving permanency. Youth aging out of the tribal court system were included in 2021. In 2023, [LB14](#) was introduced by Senator Dungan which requires that youth involved in the Juvenile Justice System who are in a court-ordered out-of-home placement on their 19th birthday shall receive information regarding B2i. LB14 was amended into [LB50](#) by [AM1980](#) and requires DHHS to implement by January 1, 2025. This has been a long-standing recommendation of the Committee and members are committed to ensuring the b2i program is accessible to youth involved in out-of-home placement at the time they reach adulthood. To continue accessibility to the B2i program, youth need to be eligible for the services regardless of their immigration status and the NCC will continue to make this a recommendation until it has been placed in statute.

Sustainability Workgroup

Keenan Page, Chair

The Sustainability Workgroup was established to make recommendations on how to improve outcomes of youth involved with B2i beyond their participation with the program. In 2023, the workgroup assessed what is currently happening with youth engaged in the program, and also began an evaluation of what can be considered successful “sustainability” in order to be able to make recommendation to the current implementation.

Future work of this group includes establishing the definition of sustainability for the B2i committee. A VMOSA analysis is actively being completed to do this. Some of the initial areas of focus include:

- Financial security needs to be established for youth to maintain success
- Educational and Career Development needs to be prioritized prior to and during B2i engagement
- A review of best practices and roles of staff or professionals involved in the youth’s case from case onset to the enrollment in B2i

The workgroup has also considered ways to evaluate past participants and what can be done to offer continued support to youth who have aged out of the B2i program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Clarify in statute that youth can be eligible for the b2i program regardless of their immigration status.
2. DHHS should develop practice guidance and/or policy focused on transition periods for youth entering and exiting the program.
3. DHHS should identify and implement best practices and ongoing evaluation mechanisms for the b2i program.

Data Collection & Evaluation Workgroup

Heather Wood, Chair

The Data Collection & Evaluation Workgroup was established to review data provided by the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) to identify any trends or concerns that may need further discussion. The workgroup discussed the significance of young adults being almost twice as likely to make progress if they have a reliable support system and 1.7 times likely to be making progress if they had stable housing. This data continues to show that the stipends are helpful, but not the only indicator of success for youth in the B2i program.