December 13, 2013

Patrick O'Donnell, Clerk of the Legislature
State Capitol, Room 2018
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dear Mr. O'Donnell:

Legislative Bill 216 of the 103rd Legislative Session of 2013 requires the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Advisory (YAVSSA) Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission to provide a written report regarding the initial implementation of the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support program. The report is to be provided to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and the Governor by December 15, 2013.

The attached report provides recommendations which are intended to provide thoughtful guidance for effective implementation of the young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act. The additional recommendations highlighted in yellow were reviewed and approved by the Nebraska Children's Commission at the November 19, 2013, Commission meeting. Additionally, the YAVSSA Committee would like to recommend that the benefits of the Bridges to Independence program be extended to address the needs of the juvenile justice system population.

Sincerely,

Karen Authier
Chairperson
Nebraska Children's Commission

Mary Jo Pankoke
Chairperson
YAVSSA Committee

Enclosure:
Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Advisory Committee – Report on Additional Recommendations for Implementation of the Voluntary Services & Support Act

Bridge to Independence and Support Advisory Committee

Report on Initial Implementation of the Voluntary Services and Support Act

November 19, 2013

The Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Advisory Committee (YAVSSAC) was appointed by the Nebraska Children's Commission to make recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Nebraska Children's Commission for a statewide implementation plan meeting the extended services program requirements of the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act. Six workgroups comprised of Advisory Committee members and other stakeholders were established to cover the following key areas of implementation:

- Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program
- Outreach, Marketing and Communications
- Case Management, Supportive Services and Housing
- Case Oversite
- Evaluation and Data Collection
- Fiscal Monitoring Issues and State-Funded Guardianship

The workgroups generated recommendations with input from a variety of stakeholders from throughout Nebraska and in close partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services. The YAVSSAC voted to approve a first round of recommendations from each of the workgroups at their meeting on September 3, 2013. This document presents a second round of recommendation, which include some modifications and expansions of the recommendations approved on September 3, 2013. Because many of the Round 2 Recommendations build on or revise the Round 1 recommendations, we have included both the Round 1 and Round 2 Recommendations in this document. The modifications are highlighted in yellow. These recommendations will form the basis for the YAVVSAC'S report due on December 15, 2013.

POLICY, ELIGIBILITY, AND TRANSITION into the PROGRAM

Note: Additional details on outreach materials and ongoing communication with young adults about the program are included in Section II, Outreach, Marketing and Communications. Section II also recommends that DHHS pursue a public-private partnership to support development of new communication materials and outreach activities to ensure young adults have a smooth transition into the program.

I Former Ward and Juvenile Probation

A. Former Ward should remain available to those young adults already enrolled in the program. This service should continue for those young adults until age 21 as long as the young adult remains eligible. This includes 3(a), OJS and dually adjudicated young adults. Currently enrolled 3(a) and dually adjudicated young adults will have the option to continue former ward services or enroll in the Bridge to Independence Program. We believe it is best practice to offer Bridge to Independence enrollment to OJS young adults, but we realize that this was not accounted for in the fiscal appropriation.

B. Former Ward can continue indefinitely or be phased out depending on the needs of the population. If there are young adults that continue to opt for enrollment in the Former Ward Program rather than the Bridge to Independence Program, then Former Ward should continue. Funding for these programs should be flexible to accommodate this.

C. Communication between Income Maintenance workers involved with the Former Ward and the Bridge to Independence Programs will be extremely important. If a young adult becomes ineligible for the Former Ward program, active efforts should be made to offer enrollment in the Bridge to Independence Program.

D. Those who have worked on the Bridge to Independence Program and LB 216 should offer assistance to Juvenile Probation. Juvenile Probation may want to create their own Bridge to Independence Program and there are many that could offer information about the federal program and implementation in Nebraska. If Juvenile Probation is not able to create its own program, legislation may be necessary.

E. If the department does not maintain the Former Ward Program to address the gap for young adults who age out after January 1, 2014 but prior to when the Bridge to Independence Program begins, funding (either Former Ward, LB 216 or other general child welfare funding) should be used to give young adults who age out in this period access to Former Ward benefits.

II <u>Initial Communication and Transition into the Program for Young Adults in the Former Ward Program.</u>

A. All current and past recipients of the Former Ward Program who have not yet turned 21 (and will not turn 21 prior to implementation of the extended program) should be sent a clear written notice about the extended program prior to December 1, 2013, informing them of:

1) The rights of eligible young adults to receive extended services and support
2) Information about eligibility and program requirements
3) Types of services and support young adults may receive in the program
4) How young adults can access the program
5) Other requirements of written notice per Sec. 17 (6)
6) An outline of differences between the Bridge to Independence Program and the Former Ward Program
7) What will happen with the Former Ward Program (e.g. when services through the Former Ward Program will cease to exist).

B. By December 1, 2013, a representative of the Department (or current Former Ward staff member) will make contact – or attempt to make contact – with current and past recipients of Former Ward who have not yet turned 21 to provide information verbally and via all available and appropriate channels (e.g. text, Facebook, social media, etc.) about the program and how young adults can sign up, review differences from the Former Ward Program, and ask the young adult if he/she would like to participate in the extended program.

C. If the young adult indicates that he/she would like to participate, the department will assess eligibility and, if the young adult is eligible and consents, arrange for the Bridge to

Independence agreement to be signed and filed with the court in the timeframe necessary to prevent a lapse in services between the transition from the Former Ward Program to the Bridge to Independence Program, if applicable.

It is important to ensure that specific changes are clearly communicated to young adults and efforts are made to avoid service interruption as young adults transitions from one program to another and/or as the department implements the extended program. For instance, room and board fees are currently covered under the Former Ward Program, and these funds are distributed directly to the college once per semester. Under the extended program, the funds may be distributed on a monthly basis.

III **Communication and Transition Into the Program for All Young People in Foster Care (age 16-19)**

- **A.** The foster care caseworker will provide an annual in-person overview of the extended program during one of the Family Team Meetings including a brochure overviewing service benefits and responsibilities. (*Please see Outreach, Marketing and Communications recommendations for details on development of this brochure*.)
- **B.** As required in LB 216 (Sec. 17 (6)) 90 days prior to the final court hearing, young adults should be sent a clear, written notice about the extended program informing them of:
  - **1)** The rights of eligible young adults to receive extended services and support
  - **2)** Information about eligibility and program requirements
  - **3)** The types of services and support young adults may receive In the program
  - **4)** How young adults can access the program
  - **5)** Other requirements of written notice per Sec. 17 (6).

In addition to this required written notice, 90 days prior to the final court hearing, LB 216 requires a representative from the department (ideally the foster care caseworker) to meet with the young adults, and determine if they would like to participate in the program. Those who opt into the program will participate in an orientation meeting with their foster care caseworker and their new Independence Coordinator. This meeting will act as the official transition from foster care to Bridge to Independence, and is discussed in more detail in the Outreach, Marketing and Communications section.

IV **Communication to Young Adults Ineligible for the Program**

- **A.** Young adults determined ineligible for the program at the meeting conducted 90 days prior to the final court hearing will be provided with a clear, written notice similar to that discussed in Sec. 7 (2) of LB 216 informing them of:
  - **1)** The explanation for why they were determined to be ineligible (in a clear and developmentally appropriate way)
  - **2)** The process for appealing the decision
  - **3)** Information about the option to sign up for the program once the young adult establishes eligibility
  - **4)** Information about and contact information for community resources that may benefit the young adult, specifically including information regarding state programs established pursuant to 42 U.S.C.677.
- **B.** This written notice should also include information about eligibility and program requirements. In addition to the written notice, this communication should be delivered through every available communication channel (e.g. email, call, text, Facebook private message). The verbal communication should include an explanation of items 1-4 under III B.

C. We recommend a face to face meeting between the young adult and his/her foster care caseworker to review eligibility requirements and complete tasks that may make the young adult eligible for the program – such as enrolling in college or a job training program, or making progress on an employment search.

V **Communication to Young Adults Who Opt Out of the Program**

A. Young adults are provided an information packet of all materials described in NE LB 216 Sec. 7 (1) (process for re-enrollment, etc.) and the list of resources described in NE LB 216 Sec. 7 (2), which will be paid for from the Program administration budget, and an exit survey, per the recommendation of the Evaluation Workgroup.

VI **Communication to Young Adults Who Become Ineligible for the Program After Participating.**

A. The extended program caseworker provides young adults with the required ineligibility notification (per NE LB 216 Sec. 7(2) 30 days before services cease. In addition to the required written notice, this communication should be delivered through every available communication channel (e.g. email, call, text, Facebook).

B. In addition to a court hearing, see Case Oversite Section. There should be an in-person exit meeting with an extended program caseworker 30 days before services cease. At this time, the young adult will be provided an information packet of all materials described in NE LB 216 Sec. 7(1) (process for re-enrollment, etc.) and the list of resources described in NE LB 216 Sec. 7(2), which will be paid for from the Program administration budget, and an exit survey, per the recommendation of the Evaluation section.

C. At this meeting, the caseworker and young adult should work together to meet any eligibility requirement to get the young adult re-enrolled in the Program. For example, the two may enroll the young adult in college classes or a job training program at that meeting, or secure/progress toward securing employment.

D. Young adults should have the opportunity to request an extension of the 30 day grace period between becoming ineligible and end of services.

OUTREACH, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Note: see attachment A, which presents the more detailed communications plan developed by the work plan; details on these recommendations.

I **Program Name Recommendation**

A. ***Bridge to Independence*** (preferred choice of young adults surveyed) is the recommended program name, with caseworkers to be called ***Independence Coordinators.***

II **Funding**

A. Items required by the bill (all materials in NE LB 216 Sec 7(1) and (2), i.e. list of resources, process for re-enrollment, exit survey) will be paid for out of the Program administration budget. The outreach, marketing and communications strategy below includes several items that are not included in the bill. ("non-required tactics"), and should therefore not be funded by the Program administration budget.

B. DHHS should work with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to assemble private contributions and administer the resulting Bridge to Independence Marketing Fund.

C. The total estimate cost of non-required tactics (see Appendix B) for 2014 is $35,550. This is the amount of private money needed to be raised to implement the strategy in its entirety.

III <u>Collaborative Creative Development</u>

A. Because Bridge to Independence will be implemented via DHHS, but non-required communications will be developed using other partners, we recommend that a fundamental design and messaging framework be developed collaboratively. The most efficient, effective way to achieve this is through a multi-agency Marketing Task Force made up of marketing professionals from DHHS (Russ Reno, DHHS designer, DHHS webmaster) and Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (Mary Kate Gulick and Brenda Weyers). Deliverables from this group would include:

1) Visual brand guide

- Bridge to Independence logo and applications guidelines
- Primary/secondary color palettes and guidelin2
- Primary/secondary type
- Photo/illustration style recommendation

2) Messaging strategy

- Positioning statement
- Brand tagline
- DHHS approved boilerplate "About the Program" content
- DHHS approved key and supporting messaging points

3) Site map for the Bridge to Independence websit3

B. Once the look and content of the program is established and approved, DHHS will develop all materials required by LB 216 using Program administration dollars, and Nebraska Children and Families Foundation will develop non-required materials using the Bridge to Independence Marketing Fund.

IV <u>Audience Segments Who Should Be Targeted with Communication and Outreach</u>

A. Young Adults

1) Minors 16-18 in foster care (Bridge to Independence prep)
2) Young adults 18-19 eligible for and opting into the extended program (Bridge to Independence Orientation)
3) Young adults 18-19 who are NOT eligible to enter the extended program (Bridge to Independence ineligibles)
4) Young adults 19-21 eligible and participating in the extended program (Bridge to Independence Retention)
5) Young adults 19-20 who become ineligible after participation and are dropped from the program (Bridge to Independence Drops)
6) Young adults 19-21 who opt out of the program, either at the time of initial eligibility or after a period of participation (Bridge to Independence Opt-outs)
7) 21 year old graduates of the extended program (Bridge to Independence Grads)

8) Young adults who are currently in Former Ward who need to transition to the extended program (Former Wards). This group is covered by Section I.
9) Young adults 19-20 who have been dropped from the Former Ward program, but may be eligible for the extended program (Former Ward Drops). This group is covered by Section I.

B. Current foster parent/placement adult

C. Case Workers and Supervisors

1) Foster care caseworkers and supervisors
2) Independence Coordinators and their supervisors

D. Service Providers

E. Media/Public/Policy Makers

1) Communications will be designed to reach the public and policy makers via the media. Policy maker specific communications will be in the form of periodic program performance reporting.

V Communication Strategies by Segment

Note: Strategies specific to informing young adults of eligibility, determining eligibility, and informing of ineligibility are included in Section I (Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program section).

A. All young adults-Bridge to Independence should have its own web presence. While it will likely be created within the DHHS website, it is critical to user experience that the navigation and site structure of these pages be independent from the current DHHS structure and follow web usability best practices. The look, site map and much general content for this site will be developed within the Creative Development Task Force.

B. Communication permission and confidentiality – Upon entering the Bridge to Independence Program from foster care, the young adult will be asked by the Independence Coordinator to select which methods of communications are acceptable, and to provide the correct information for each method. The choices are:

1) Phone
2) Email
3) Mail
4) Facebook, (all Independence Coordinators will be trained by Deb Troia at DHHS to communicate via the confidential private message feature on Facebook and how to avoid revealing private information)
5) Text Message
6) Other preferred communication channels as mutually agreed upon by the Independence Coordinator and young adult.

C. Bridge to Independence Prep – youth in care ages 16-18 (see Policy, Eligibility, and Transition Into the Program for communication guidelines for these young adults)

D. Bridge to Independence Orientation (see Policy, Eligibility, and Transition Into the Program for eligibility outreach):

1) Program Orientation meeting that includes the young adult, the foster care caseworker and the Independence Coordinator. This meeting will act as an official handoff from foster care to Bridge to Independence, and will provide the young adult with the necessary information about the benefits and responsibilities in the new program. Orientation content will be developed by the Marketing Task Force

and, because this is a non-required tactic, any hard materials will be produced using the Bridge to Independence Marketing Fund.

2) *"My Life"* binder (given at orientation). This binder will provide young adults a place to house all the important documents they'll accumulate as adults, as well as any orientation or program materials they receive. The binder will include:

- Bridge to Independence Orientation materials (outlined in Policy, Eligibility, and Transition Into the Program section)
- Signed services agreement
- Contact information/directory
- Tabs for all the other areas of life (health care, housing, finances, education, etc.) so even transient young adults will have one place to keep their materials.
- General guidance pages regarding each life area, including resources available to the user

E. Bridge to Independence Ineligibles (See Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program for communication guidelines for ineligibles)

F. Bridge to Independence Retention

1) Quarterly eNews sharing resources and events that might be interesting and valuable to them (career nights, college fairs, budgeting classes, etc.) and that provide success stories from other young adults. This eNews will use the look and content parameters established by the Marketing Task Force, and will be written, designed and deployed each month by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. Each quarter's communication will first be approved by DHHS before deployment. DHHS will provide email addresses for Bridge to Independence participants who have opted to receive email communications. Links to each quarter's eNews will be made available via Facebook, and the Facebook page will be promoted to community partners and participants in the program.

2) Text reminders from the Independence Coordinators of meetings, events, etc. This will fall under the responsibilities of program case management

G. Bridge to Independence Drops (See Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program, section V for communication guidelines for young adults who lose eligibility after participating in Bridge to Independence.)

H. Bridge to Independence Opt – outs (See Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program, section IV for communication guidelines for young adults who have opted out of Bridge to Independence)

I. Bridge to Independence Grads

1) Young adults are provided an information packet all materials described in NE LB216 Sec. 7 (2) (list of resources, process for re-enrollment). However, because the bill only requires these items for young adults who become eligible for the program, the cost of printing these packets should not come out of the administrative budget, but rather the Bridge to Independence Marketing Fund. The packet should also include an exit survey, per the recommendation of the Evaluation section.

J. Former Wards (See Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program, section I for eligibility outreach and communication guidelines for young adults in the Former Ward Program.)

K. Former Wards Drops (See Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program, section I for eligibility outreach and communication guidelines for young adults who have been dropped from Former Ward.)

L. Current foster parent/placement adult

1) If appropriate, inclusion of foster parent/placement adult at annual, in-person overview of Bridge to Independence provided by foster care caseworkers at one of the monthly Family Team Meetings to young people age 16-18 within the foster care system (first mentioned in Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program, section II-A)
2) Email or direct mail to foster parent/placement adult 90 days before youth ages out explaining the parent's potential role in YAVSS after the young person ages out, and what choices need to be made.
3) Training through the contracted foster care agencies. General program messaging can be developed by the Marketing Task Force and may draw upon visiting speakers from Project Everlast and Jim Casey Youth.
4) Informational brochures to be distributed at trainings, foster care meetings (similar to those to be given to service providers.)

M. Foster Care Caseworkers and Supervisors

1) The program manual, cheat sheets, compliance checklists and initial training will be developed by DHHS.
2) We recommend annual training sessions that incorporate outside information at staff trainings, including young adult panels from Project Everlast and experts, videos, webinars, handouts, etc. on late adolescent brain development from Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.
3) Bridge to Independence overview brochures (as discussed in the Policy, Eligibility and Transition into the Program, section II) to be distributed to Bridge to Independence Prep audience at their annual, in-person program overview meetings between ages 16-18.
4) Bridge to Independence exit packets (as discussed in Policy, Eligibility and Transition into the Program, section IV and V-B) to provide to ineligible and opt-out young adults
5) Stories on the extended program's successes in any regular department communications (eNews, newsletter, etc.) Stories will be provided by Independence Coordinators to Russ Reno (as is currently done by foster care caseworkers) for distribution.
6) Monthly conference calls for caseworkers and supervisors to share experiences and learn from one another and inclusion in existing operations meetings.

N. Independence Coordinators and Supervisors (outside of job training to be determined.)

1) An Independence Coordinator website, housing all forms and brochures to be printed or ordered on demand, a peer-to-peer caseworker forum, success stories, training event schedule. This will be housed on the DHHS website, and created by DHHS based on the work done by the Marketing Task Force.
2) Inclusion on the current monthly eNews

3) Independence Coordinator monthly conference calls (similar to those used by foster care caseworkers).

O. Service Providers

1) Fact sheets to communicate the needs and potential negative outcomes of young adults who have aged out of care, as well as the counteracting benefits provided by the extended program
2) Brochures overviewing the benefits of the extended program. This will be the same overview brochure as is provided to foster parents.
3) 60-minute program launch trainings in all service areas providing detailed, program specific information and materials to service providers, including human services organizations, and community partners. Content for these trainings and the best people to present the material will be decided upon by the Marketing Task Force. On launch training will be held in each service area, plus training for PALS, Branching Out and CSI for a total of 8 trainings.
4) Quarterly lunch & learns (rotate service area) to train service providers on the extended program, provide materials and let them meet their extended program contact. These will be conducted on a rotating basis by presenters to be determined by the Marketing Task Force.

P. Media/Public/Policy makers (non –regulatory communications that will filter through the media to public and policy makers.

1) These public relations materials will be handles by DHHS communications, building on the work o the Marketing Task Force, unless otherwise noted.
2) Program launch press conference
3) Press kit including
    - New program vs. Former Ward comparison sheet
    - Cost expected to be avoided by making a better transition to adulthood
    - Goals of the program/purpose
4) Three months post-launch of intensive pitching on topics to be determined by the Marketing Task Force.
5) Monthly or bimonthly media pitches by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation based on success stories from Project Everlast.
6) Annual outcome stories/program review pitches.

CASE MANAGEMENT, SUPPORTIVE SERVICES, AND HOUSING

I **Culture Change.** DHHS must recognize providing services through the Young Adult Voluntary Services (this program) will be a big culture change, not only for DHHS' Children and Family Services but also the Legal System.

A. DHHS is coming from a position of an adversary in the minds of these young adults. Young adults are apprehensive about DHHS being in this role. If DHHS doesn't do well at the beginning, trust will be lost.

B. DHHS will switch from a compliance role to being a partner with the young adults. Young adults driven. Give up the power. Strength-based. Guide the young adult to help them make decisions.

C. The role of the people who work with the young adult is hands-on with connections to community services. Relationships are key.

D. The system must be able to tolerate risk. When scrutinized, the system has to continue to remain true to its principle of Young adult-driven.

1) Media and political scrutiny sometimes result in more rules and DHHS must be able to resist that to benefit the young adult.

II Recruitment, Selection, Training and Support of Staff and Supervisors.

A. Staff who work with the young adults should be titled "Independence Coordinators". The title was created and voted upon by members of Project Everlast.

B. Independence Coordinators (IC) should be specially trained. They should have specialized caseloads, when feasible. Supervisors should be specialized and trained and may need to work across service areas. Peer support should be provided to the Independence Coordinators.

1) IC will be identified 3-6 months before the transition of the young adult aging out of care so s/he can work to establish a relationship with the young adult.

2) The orientation meeting between the "foster care worker" and the Independence Coordinator will take place at least 90 days before the young adult's transition to Bridge to Independence.

3) The young adult will decide the level of involvement of the existing case manager in his/her future team. The Independent Coordinator will be the facilitator of the team. This preserves the young adult's voice and choice, at the same time meets the need for specialized workers with specialized caseloads.

C. Care needs to be taken to select the ICs because a different skill set is required than for those who manage child and family caseloads.

D. Caseload size should range from 15 in the rural areas up to 20 in urban areas. If young adults need more intensive services, such as for mental health services, they may be referred to others, such as the Regional Behavioral Health system.

E. Territory shouldn't be a factor. Current technology may be used to stay in contact with the young adult as long as confidentiality is addressed. IV-E requires face-to-face contact with the young adult one time per month. This will need to be addressed.

III Coordination and Collaboration.

A. Children and Family Services must ensure other divisions within DHHS, are involved and collaborating regarding this population to ensure their needs are met. Divisions which must be involved are: Medicaid, Adult Protective Services, Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, Access Nebraska. These divisions will have valuable knowledge of resources and programs these young adults may be eligible for. They may be able to streamline processes for the young adults. Coordination and collaboration with community services and partners is critical because many serve this population and a collaborative approach ensures the most effective use of resources.

IV **Training that Addresses and Helps Professionals to Understand the Developmental Needs of Young Adults.**

- **A.** Intense, comprehensive and focused towards needs, strengths and goals of the young adult. (see list of training topics in attachment C)
- **B.** Bring in experts from the community.
- **C.** Use curriculums that are already developed.
- **D.** Train judges, system partners.

V **Addressing Safety Issues in Developmentally Appropriate Manner**

- **A.** Overall Safety for Young adults
  - **1)** A skills assessment should be used as part of case management model.
  - **2)** Training should be provided to assist the Independence Coordinators to guide the young adults.
- **B.** Safety – Legal Related Issues
  - **1)** Follow mandatory reporting guidelines already established in regards to concerns about parenting (for children of young adults in the Bridge to Independence program).
    - o The Bridge to Independence Coordinator should not conduct an initial assessment for young adults or families on their caseload.
  - **2)** If an IC is alerted to an unsafe or unethical working condition, the role of the Independence Coordinator is to educate, support and plan, and leave the decision making to the young adult.
  - **3)** Educate young adults on how to use an attorney. Provide information in the community resource guide.
  - **4)** The Independence Coordinator should only involve law enforcement if there is imminent risk.
- **C.** General Safety Issues
  - **1)** 24 hour on call support is available to young adults in times of crisis. Best practice is that the Independence Coordinator is available to meet the immediate needs of the young adult whenever possible.

VI **DHHS Case Management Practice for the Bridge to Independence Program**

- **A.** As a regular part of case management, the Independence Coordinator will coordinate and facilitate an "Independence Plan Meeting" with people identified by the young adult. Although this is similar to a "Family Team Meeting", it is young adult driven. These meetings may need to be more than monthly and should be pro-active. The purpose of these meetings is to get everyone on the same page, bring together all existing plans, and assess where the young adult is on the goals. These meetings may be on specific topics such as employment, education, housing, and health, including mental health, including partners and professionals in the community. This information could be used for the Independent Living Transition Plan for the court.

B. Case management should follow an evidence-based model that is developmentally appropriate and respectful of young adults' autonomy.

1) DHHS should use a model specifically geared toward serving young adults transitioning to adulthood. The Transition to Independence Model (TIP) was discussed as a viable option to explore further. The workgroup acknowledges that there are other models in existence, but the TIP model has the advantage of already being used by some Behavioral Health Regions in Nebraska. TIP is more of a philosophy than a model, and the workgroup recommended that Trauma-Informed Care as well as Harm Reduction could and should be easily incorporated.

2) DHHS form a group consisting of DHHS staff, DHHS and CCFL trainers, Behavioral Health staff, young adults and service providers in the community who serve young adults. This group would fully explore the TIP model (as well as any other models the Department identifies) as it relates to serving young adults to determine the best option.

3) Model identification, curriculum development, and implementation steps be conducted in the calendar year 2014 in anticipation that full model implementation would occur in January, 2015.

C. Because the Bridge to Independence Program begins January, 2014, the workgroup recommends HHS and CCFL consult with community service providers to create an interim training curriculum for Independence Coordinators until an evidence based model is selected and implemented.

1) DHHS should explore the possibility of using System of Care grant funds for the costs of training.

D. The workgroup supports the service list created by DHHS and circulated in the initial set of recommendations. The service list is attached at the end of these recommendations.

The workgroup learned at the beginning of our assignment that Thomas Pristow had decided that DHHS will do case management for this population. As the group answered the Guiding Questions, several key points surfaced. That information is in the longer document from the work group. The work group recognizes and appreciates the open and collaborative process of the Rules and Regulation Work Group. DHHS should continue to be collaborative and invite feedback throughout the development and implementation process. We will all be working outside of our comfort zone as we figure this out, but debate is productive and must continue. Everyone wants this to succeed for the young adults and the outcomes for the young adults are most important.

VII **<u>Housing Options</u>**

A. Housing decisions should be directed by the young adult, with case managers being as flexible as possible. Case managers or other case professionals should not immediately decline the young adult's housing plan. Rather, if case professionals have concerns regarding safety, the case manager should first explore the option of developing a contingency plan with the young adult in an effort to allow the decision to be young adult-directed and respectful of the young adult's autonomy while still maintaining safety. It is important that young adults have the opportunity to make mistakes within the safety net offered by this program.

B. The Independence Coordinator will help guide young adults into finding safe and secure housing. LB 216 has a requirement that young adults be provided a written 30-day ineligibility notification before they are no longer in the program. If unsafe housing is chosen, the IC will inform the young adult their housing choice doesn't meet safety standards. The IC will give the young adult the option of finding safe housing that does meet safety standards in 30 days. If the young adult doesn't find new housing that meets the safety standards in those 30 days, the young adults will be given a 30-day verbal and written notice that s/he will not be eligible for the housing stipend. The written notice (in addition to verbal) of the unsafe housing should include what acceptable housing options would be, and the timeline they have to correct the problem (30 days to fix, then 30 days before termination). Case management will continue. We believe this meets the IV-E requirements but further research may be needed.

C. Supervised Independent Living Setting options should include as many options as possible, such as single or shared apartment, house, college dormitory, other post-secondary educational or vocational housing (e.g. sorority/fraternity housing), parental home, scattered site housing, supportive housing, host homes, transitional living programs, halfway housing, three quarter way housing, sober living housing, etc. Mental health facilities and treatment facilities should also be included as housing options. A wide variety of housing options is necessary to provide for the variety of needs of young adults.

D. Whenever possible, housing subsidies should be provided directly to young adults. If that is unable to happen, an informal contract should be developed between the young adult and the third party recipient to clarify how the subsidy will be used. IV-E requirements must be met in specific settings. The case manager should help facilitate this process in a way that is empowering to the young adult.

CASE OVERSITE

I Case Reviews

A. Recommend that the Mediation Centers conduct 6-month reviews in a structure similar to pre-hearing conferences based on recommendations and needs of the young adult. The justification is that the Mediation Centers have an existing process that feeds into court reviews, have statewide infrastructure and trained facilitators that are uniquely qualified to give people voice and could be very young adult-directed. Young adults would be invited and encouraged but not required to attend 6-month reviews. Young adults that do not attend the review would have the opportunity to provide input in writing.

1) The workgroup also considered the Foster Care Review Office as an alternative. Benefits of the FCRO include that there is an existing process in place that could be modified to fit this need, the ability to track and disseminate data and that the FCRO is an independent state agency that does not receive DHHS funding.

B. The caseworker should discuss the 6-month review with the young adult at the monthly meeting prior to the review. The written case/transition plan should contain information and questions focused on the 6-month case review. The caseworker and the young adult should complete those questions at their meeting prior to the 6-month case review. This should advise the young adult of the date and location of the review and what will happen at and the benefits of attending the review.

1) The written case/transition plan should have a space for the young adult to indicate if they plan to attend the review or not.

2) 2. The written case/transition plan should have a space for the young adult to indicate if they would like to have their attorney attend the review on their behalf (if they have requested that one be appointed). These arrangements would need to be made separately between the attorney and the young adult, and attorneys should inquire about this with young adults they are representing.

C. If the young adult opts not to attend the review, the default should be that the reviewer conducts a paper review.

D. Young adults should have the opportunity to submit written input for case reviews.

1) A modified version of the Youth Questionnaire should be provided to young adults with the notice of review to provide written input if they cannot attend the review.

2) The caseworker should also provide a hard copy of the questionnaire to the young adult at the monthly meeting prior to the review.

3) The questionnaire should also be available on the website and provided in the packet when the young adult enters the program.

4) The website should allow the young adult to submit the questionnaire electronically. The packet and the caseworker should inform the young adult of how they can submit the form to the reviewer.

E. Focus and documentation of case reviews

1) The Department should provide the case plan at the 6-month case review. This should be a modified form of the under 19 transition plan and should utilize best practices from the Jim Casey Issue Brief.

2) The reviewer for the 6-month case review should have a form that tracks the case/transition plan but that is shorter and meets the requirements of the state statute and federal law for the review.

3) The young adult should have an opportunity to report at the review on what contact they have had with their caseworker, what they have agreed upon and whether those services have been provided. The form used at the review should specifically address these issues. If the young adult opts not to attend the review, there should be a space for the young adult to address these issues in the questionnaire.

4) The young person should be centrally involved in the development of the case/transition plan. The case/transition plan should be completed in hard copy so the caseworker and the young adult can complete the form together at their in-person meeting.
5) Examples from other states, specifically Michigan's transition plan, should be used as a guide.
6) The case/transition plan should build off of the categories in Nebraska's under 19 transition plan and should add additional categories including: transportation, parenting resources, and substance abuse. The case/transition plan should also track the services enumerated in LB 216 (codified in Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-4505).
7) The workgroup and members of Project Everlast should have an opportunity to review and provide input on drafts of the transition/case plan and forms used at the review.
8) Recommend that a report or other documentation be completed at the 6-month case review. If an agreement is reached on the status and progress of the case, the report would be signed by the young adult and the Department and submitted to the court. This would give the court background on the 6-month case review for the 12-month permanency hearing or other hearing. If there is a lack of agreement, it would be documented in the report and the young adult can choose not to sign the report if they wish. Regardless of whether they agree or disagree, the young adult should be provided information about how to request a hearing and/or an attorney. There should be further discussion of what this report should look like and how it can be young adult-friendly.

II Permanency Hearings.

A. Recommend that legislation be introduced to require that permanency hearings and other requested hearings in these cases be expedited.

B. Recommend that a hearing officer be appointed if the young adult makes a request, time necessitates it (i.e., a hearing before a judge would cause significant delay), the young adult does not want the judge to hear their case or the judge believes a hearing officer should be appointed.

C. Recommend that the Nebraska Supreme Court promulgate a rule on hearing officers in juvenile courts pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-230 (5). The Case Oversight workgroup of Young Adult Voluntary Support and Services Advisory Committee will also request to propose recommendations for the rule to the Nebraska Supreme Court.

D. There should be a legislative amendment if necessary to clarify that the juvenile court has authority to review when a young adult is involuntarily terminated from the program.

E. A modified version of the Youth Questionnaire should also be provided to young adults at the monthly meeting prior to the permanency hearing to provide written input if they cannot attend the hearing, and the young adult should be informed of how they can submit the form to the court or electronically.

III Notifying Young Adults of Right to Request Attorney and Hearing

A. There should be notice to the young person of their right to an attorney and a hearing at the end of the 6-month review if there is disagreement. This should be the same or similar to the written notice required to be provided at other times. The reviewer should provide this information to the young adult.

B. A form should be created for young adults to request a hearing outside of the 6-month review and should be provided in the packet when the young person enters the program.

IV Meaningful Participation of Young Adults

A. Recommend that reviews follow best practice recommendations from the Jim Casey Young Adults Opportunities Initiative Issue Brief for ensuring young adults are full partners in the process, the venue of reviews are young adult-friendly, and that young adults are prepared for meaningful participation, including:

1) Ensuring the venue is young adult-friendly should include that reviews take place in an informal setting/outside the courtroom whenever possible, that those responsible for reviews have training on how to ask questions to young adults, and that reviews are scheduled at times that allow for the participation of young adults (i.e., physical presence whenever possible and when young adults cannot be physically present or decline to attend, have an option to participate in reviews using technology or have their voice heard through an appropriate advocate).

2) Preparing the young person for meaningful participation should start with notice of time, place and purpose of the review and the right to and role of an attorney, letting the young adult know how they can initiate a hearing to address problems or concerns that arise between reviews, identification of other people the young person may want to be present at reviews and help in making arrangements for their attendance, and helping the young person prepare for how they will respond to issues of concern that may arise in the hearing.

B. There should be outreach to young adults and developmentally appropriate ways for young adults to be informed about this program and to access information about their rights and the hearing process, including a video and/or brochure, website, Facebook page, a phone number to call for assistance if there is a problem (perhaps associated with the helpline or Project Everlast) and notice and reminders sent via text message.

C. There should be a peer advocacy program through Project Everlast to accompany young people to reviews and hearings if desired and to support and provide information to them ahead of time.

D. The caseworker and attorney (if appointed) should work with the young adult to help them reach out to other supportive individuals they may wish to have attend reviews.

E. Materials should be created that include a brief set of principles about how permanency hearings in the extended program are different from a (3)(a) hearing and how legal representation is to be young adult-directed.

V Training

A. Recommend training for professionals involved in these cases, including attorneys, judges, CASAs and others. The training for attorneys should supplement the current guardian ad litem training, and should be offered as a webinar for ease of participation. Other training opportunities, such as a more advanced training or training required or incorporated into the GAL Guidelines, should be considered in the future.

The workgroup discussed that training should cover how a GAL should advise a potentially-eligible young adult about the program and the role of the attorney if appointed to represent a young adult in the extended program, and should offer CLE, GAL and ethics credits whenever possible. The workgroup agreed that the Court Improvement Project should provide and/or partner to provide this training. The workgroup also agreed that there should be templates, protocols and forms developed to assist young adults, judges, reviewers, attorneys and other professionals.

EVALUATION AND DATA COLLECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

I Evaluation Tool

A. Currently, federal requirements mandate that all states implement a 22-question National Young Adults in Transition Database (NYTD) survey with all Young Adults in foster care at 17, and then again at 19 and 21. Nebraska implemented this survey with 17-year-olds in Oct. 2010 and will do so again in Oct. of this year (selection occurs every 3 years). States have the option of implementing two more comprehensive versions of NYTD instead of the basic 22-question survey, which are known as NYTD Plus Abbreviated (57 questions) and NYTD Plus Full (88 questions).

In order to compare outcomes of young adults in the extended services and support program to those who are not in the program, we recommend that DHHS switch from the 22-question NYTD survey to a slightly altered version of NYTD Plus Abbreviated. Prior to finalization of the survey, we recommend it be piloted with members of Project Everlast and adjusted accordingly. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative may be available to provide some technical assistance in finalizing the survey. We also recommend that all young adults in the extended program be surveyed at the time of entry and every 6 months after so progress can be tracked. Gathering data every 6 months will also allow for outcomes to be measured for young adults who participate in the program for a shorter period of time, such as 1 year. Surveys from young adults in the extended program can be collected either at two set times per year (similar to how Project Everlast/Opportunity Passport collect surveys) or at regular 6 month intervals, which the caseworker will be responsible for monitoring.

B. We recommend that a public/private partnership be explored to allow a contract with an independent external evaluator for outreach and collection of surveys, as this agency would have more time to dedicate to collecting surveys and could help young people feel more comfortable in answering honestly. Young adults could take the survey by phone, by submitting a written copy via mail, or online. We recommend that emphasis during Year 1 of implementation be on collecting surveys from young adults in the program, with efforts expanding to young people not in the program in Year 2. Surveys may should continue to be collected from young adults not in the extended program by DHHS at 19 and 21, per federal guidelines. This independent external agency (in collaboration with DHHS) would be responsible for the initial analysis of data collected and assisting the Advisory Committee in meeting the reporting requirements set forth in Sec. 13 (1) of LB 216. The independent external agency would also be responsible for providing the Advisory Committee with a more comprehensive evaluation report by December 2015.

C. If possible, we recommend that random ID numbers be assigned at the time the young person takes the survey to maintain confidentiality. We recommend that DHHS explore whether the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative would be available for technical assistance on this. We recommend that all NYTD responses (of both those in and not in the program) be stored in an excel spreadsheet, which the independent external agency contracting with DHHS has ongoing and easy access to.

D. We recommend that DHHS include mention of the NYTD survey in the voluntary services and support agreement young adults are required to sign upon entrance into the program. We recommend that this is kept broad (e.g. "I agree to participate in the NYTD survey") and that adherence to this item not be used as a basis for termination from the program. If necessary comply with any regulations to protect information for research participation.

E. We recommend that, if possible, N-FOCUS be programmed to automatically trigger the sending of a reminder to young people when it is time for them to take the survey (similar to how N-FOCUS would send the 30-day ineligibility notice). This could include a link to the survey online and a phone number to call if the young person wanted to take the survey via phone or needed a paper copy sent to him/her.

F. Private funding streams should be explored to offer incentives to both groups of young adults to encourage participation in the survey. We recommend that these incentives be offered in the form of $10 gift cards for only young adults in the program starting in Year 1, and both those in and not in the program starting in Year 2.

II **<u>Fiscal Accountability</u>**

A. We recommend that DHHS track all expenditures and provide quarterly reports detailing itemized program service costs and program administrative costs, including, but not limited to, specifics about administrative costs, salaries, training costs (including itemized costs, the cost of materials, the number of attendees at each training, travel costs, and the cost to train the trainers), and staff and supervisor turnover and changes (including the location of staff and supervisors), to the Advisory Committee. This should also include itemized adoption and guardianship costs and the state-extended guardianship assistance program costs.

B. We recommend that the Advisory Committee review these reports, provide recommendations to DHHS and the Children's Commission if necessary, and include the financial reports and any recommendations made as a part of their annual report to the

Children's Commission, HHS Committee of the Legislature, DHHS, and the Governor of the state of Nebraska.

III Tracking Supportive Services

A. To ensure young adults are receiving the supportive services they need to guide them to success, case managers should clearly document and track specific services provided in the young adult's transition plan and in reports for case reviews and permanency hearings.

B. We recommend that judges or hearing officers or both utilize a series of age-appropriate questions modeled after those in Through the Eyes' Transition Planning Guide or in NRCYD's resource during hearings to asking young adults about their transition plan, services they're receiving etc.

C. We recommend that the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) review files for young adults in the extended program to track service provision as they are mandated to do for children and youth in foster care. The rationale for this is that the FCRO already has that capacity and the necessary information systems in place, re-training would not be necessary, and this would be consistent with their current practice.

IV Young Adult Satisfaction

A. We recommend that the independent external agency contracting with DHHS (as discussed in the Evaluation Tool section) collect short exit surveys from all young adults leaving the program to assess the reason for leaving and overall satisfaction with the experience. The Evaluation and Data Workgroup is in the process of developing an example survey, which should be piloted with Project Everlast prior to finalization. We recommend that this survey be provided as a part of the Exit Packets (per the Communication Workgroup's recommendation) along with a stamped envelope for young adults to return the survey to the independent external agency. If the survey is not returned in 3 weeks, the independent external agency could then follow up with the young person via phone, mail, or internet. We recommend that an incentive of $10 gift cards be provided to young adults for taking the exit survey. We recommend that public/private partnerships be explored to make this happen.

V Public/Private Partnership

A. Private funding and public/private partnerships should be explored to support the implementation of these recommendations. The estimated cost for the independent external evaluator is approximately $42,000 for two years of implementation: $32,000 for survey collection and $10,000 for evaluator and analysis costs.

FISCAL MONITORING ISSUES AND STATE FUNDED GUARDIANSHIP

Note: Recommendations (all committee members strongly agreed or agreed with the following (listed in prioritized order) :

- **A.** Modify existing statutory language to comply with the requirements of LB 216 to extend guardianship assistance beyond age 19.
- **B.** DHHS will need to remove barriers to licensure (including educating potential guardians of the benefits of licensure and providing a list of long term care options, educating case workers, non-safety waivers) to ensure that more young adults can be served by the Federal Guardianship Assistance Program.
- **C.** Information regarding extended services should be provided to all relevant court stakeholders (judges, hearing officers, attorneys) to ensure that orders and petitions are IV-E compliant.
- **D.** DHHS should provide an easy-to-understand document (script?) to all caseworkers, judges, appointed attorneys, applicable young adults, providers, potential guardians and foster parents detailing the eligibility requirements for the Bridge to Independence program.
- **E.** There should be private dollars and state general funds utilized in a public private partnership to fully fund all eligible state extended guardianships.
- **F.** DHHS will provide financial support for state extended guardianships to the extent possible with the $400,000 appropriation, after which the young adult should be transferred to NCFF (or other entity) for money distribution and education/work eligibility. DHHS should continue to maintain NFOCUS records.
  - **1)** If the state general fund allocation of $400,000 is the only funding source permitted to support the state extended guardianship program, extended subsidies should be provided to young adults at the assessed rate until the age of 20 (one year).
- **G.** An Income Maintenance Foster Care (IMFC) worker should review the financial needs and behavioral risks of the young adult prior to the age of 19 to determine the amount of subsidy to be provided by the state extended guardianship subsidy.
- **H.** No formal case management services will be provided under the state extended guardianship assistance program. Instead, an IMFC worker should conduct the initial eligibility assessment, with the young adult meeting with the IMFC once every 6 months to verify continued eligibility.
- **I.** After an IMFC worker establishes the monthly guardianship stipend, Right Turn should provide transition support to facilitate the Partnership Agreement.
- **J.** Right Turn has the ability to work with all guardianships and adoptions prior to age 19 and should receive private dollars to support administrative functions to continue to work with young adults in guardianships and adoptions after age 19.
- **K.** Right turn will provide the state and private funded guardianship stipends to guardians and young adults (as determined by Partnership Agreement) as they help to increase permanency and stability in these relationships. DHHS should also consider having Right

Turn facilitate the Federal Guardianship and Adoption Assistance program for young adults after age 19.

L. Right turn will provide training and information on extended permanency subsidies to young adults and families.

M. State extended guardianship assistance subsidy payments should be paid directly to the young adult, or as developmentally appropriate, direct payments to the young adult could be phased in over time. A partnership agreement between the guardian and young adult should be considered and other staggering support system should be in place to learn how to budget appropriately.

1) The Young Adult and Guardian will enter into an Extended Partnership Agreement that is developmentally appropriate and clearly outlines the financial arrangement for young people to have housing, food and other needs met.

2) For any young adult whose guardian fails or is unable to distribute the supportive payment to the young adult, DHHS should set forth a grievance procedure.