

Bridge to Independence

Annual Data Report

October 16, 2015



The Division of Children and Family Services
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services



Bridge to Independence

P Bridge to Independence

		Time Period	Actual Value	Current Trend	Baseline %Change	
PM	Bridge-Apps	Number of young adults who applied for the Bridge to Independence Program within the last thirty days.	Sep 2015	8	↘ 1	-92% ↓
PM	Bridge-Accepted	Number of young adults who signed a Voluntary Services and Support Agreement within the last month.	Sep 2015	13	↗ 1	-82% ↓
PM	Bridge-Enrolled	Number of young adults currently enrolled in the Bridge to Independence Program.	Sep 2015	146	↗ 4	97% ↑
PM	Bridge-IV-E	Percentage of young adults who are IV-E eligible	Sep 2015	21%	↘ 1	425% ↑
PM	Bridge-Area1	Percentage of enrollees in ESA and NSA.	Sep 2015	60%	↗ 2	18% ↑
PM	Bridge-Area2	Percentage of enrollees in SESA, CSA and WSA.	Sep 2015	40%	↘ 2	-18% ↓
PM	Bridge-InState	Number of participating youth in-state.	Sep 2015	141	↗ 5	48% ↑
PM	Bridge-OutOfSta	Number of participating youth out-of-state.	Sep 2015	5	→ 1	0% →
PM	Bridge-Males	Percentage of males enrolled.	Sep 2015	37%	↘ 1	54% ↑
PM	Bridge-Females	Percentage of females enrolled.	Sep 2015	63%	↗ 1	-17% ↓
PM	bridge-pregnant	Number of pregnant / expecting enrollees.	Sep 2015	11	→ 1	57% ↑
PM	Bridge-Dependen	Number of enrollees with dependents.	Sep 2015	28	→ 1	211% ↑
PM	Bridge-Couch	Number of young adults who are "couch surfing".	Sep 2015	7	↗ 1	133% ↑
PM	Bridge-Shelter	Number of young adults who are in a shelter.	Sep 2015	0	→ 1	0% →
PM	Bridge-grad	Number of young adults graduating from the program within the last thirty days.	Sep 2015	6	↗ 4	100% ↑
PM	Bridge-SelfTerm	Number of young adults who terminated their membership within the last month.	Sep 2015	0	→ 11	0% →
PM	Bridge-DCFSTerm	Number of terminations initiated by DHHS within the last month.	Sep 2015	5	↗ 2	400% ↑
PM	Bridge-Contact	Percentage of young adults who have had contact with their Independence Coordinator within the last thirty days.	Sep 2015	97%	→ 1	-3% ↓
PM	Bridge-Medicaid	Percentage of young adults receiving Medicaid within the last month.	Sep 2015	91%	↗ 1	17% ↑
PM	Bridge-Ent	Number of youth with a Letter of Entitlement	Sep 2015	5	→ 1	0% →
PM	Bridge-TLP	Percentage of young adults who have a Transition Living Plan.	Sep 2015	100%	→ 1	12% ↑
PM	Bridge-Educatio	Percentage of young adults meeting the educational requirement within the last month.	Sep 2015	33%	↗ 1	-34% ↓
PM	Bridge-Employe	Percentage of young adults meeting the employment requirement within the last month.	Sep 2015	42%	↘ 1	50% ↑
PM	Bridge-Barriers	Percentage of young adults participating in the Program to Remove Barriers to Employment	Sep 2015	21%	↘ 1	-5% ↓
PM	Bridge-IEP	Number of young adults who had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) while a State Ward.	Sep 2015	51	↗ 2	113% ↑
PM	Bridge-MentalHe	Number of young adults who had a mental health diagnosis while a State Ward	Sep 2015	98	↗ 4	58% ↑

Number of enrollees with dependents.



Number of participating youth in-state.



Number of participating youth out-of-state.



Number of pregnant / expecting enrollees.



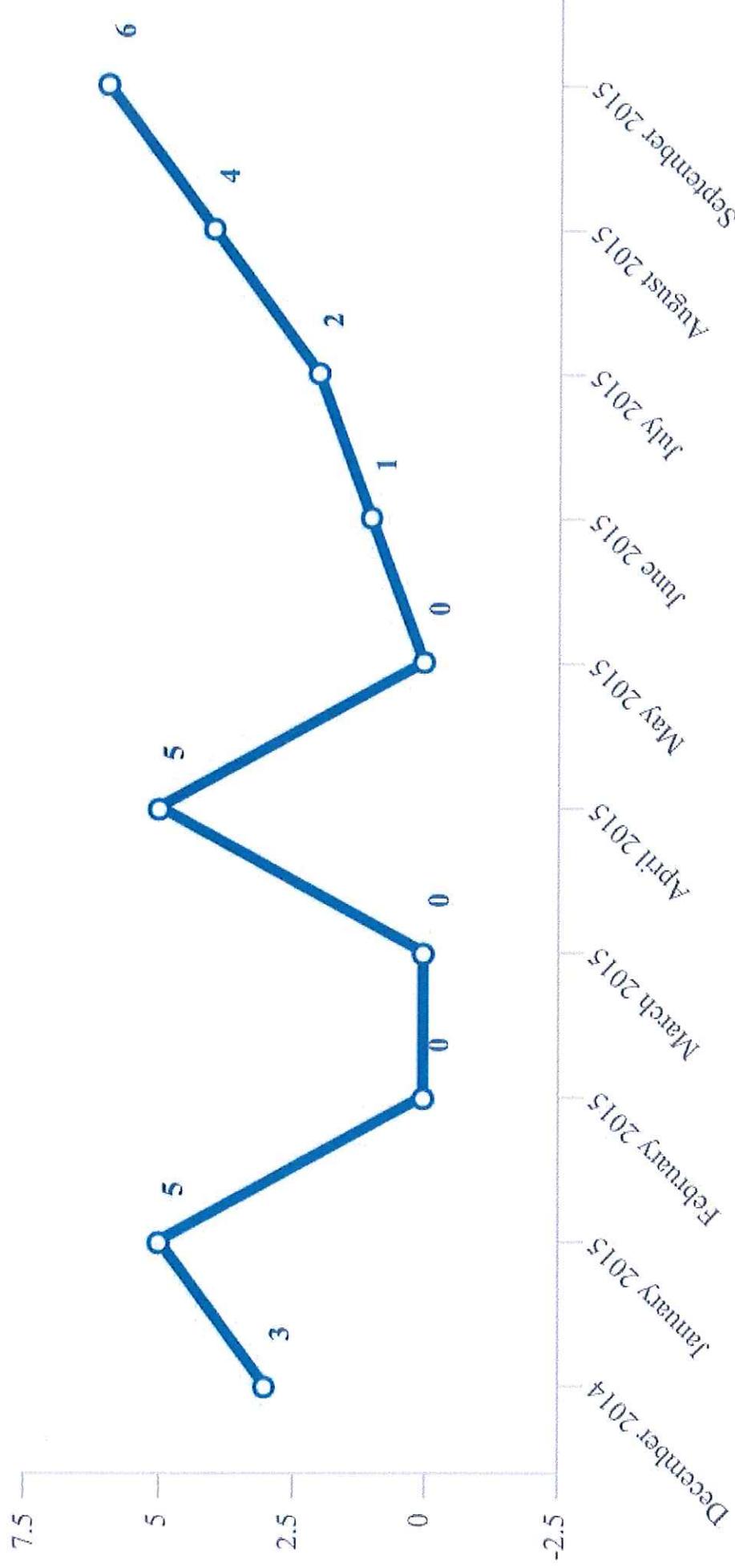
Number of terminations initiated by DHHS within the last month.



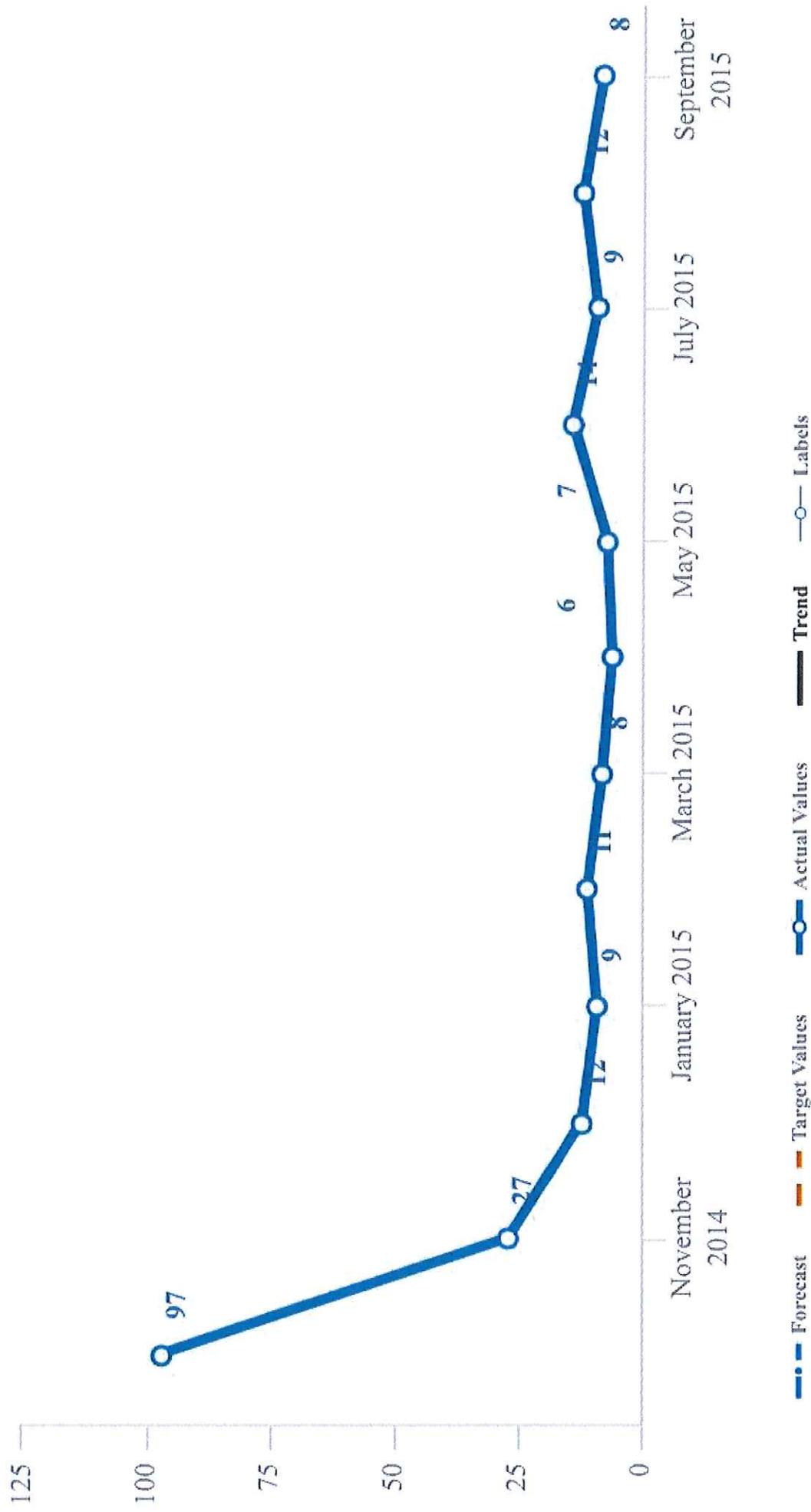
Number of young adults currently enrolled in the Bridge to Independence Program.



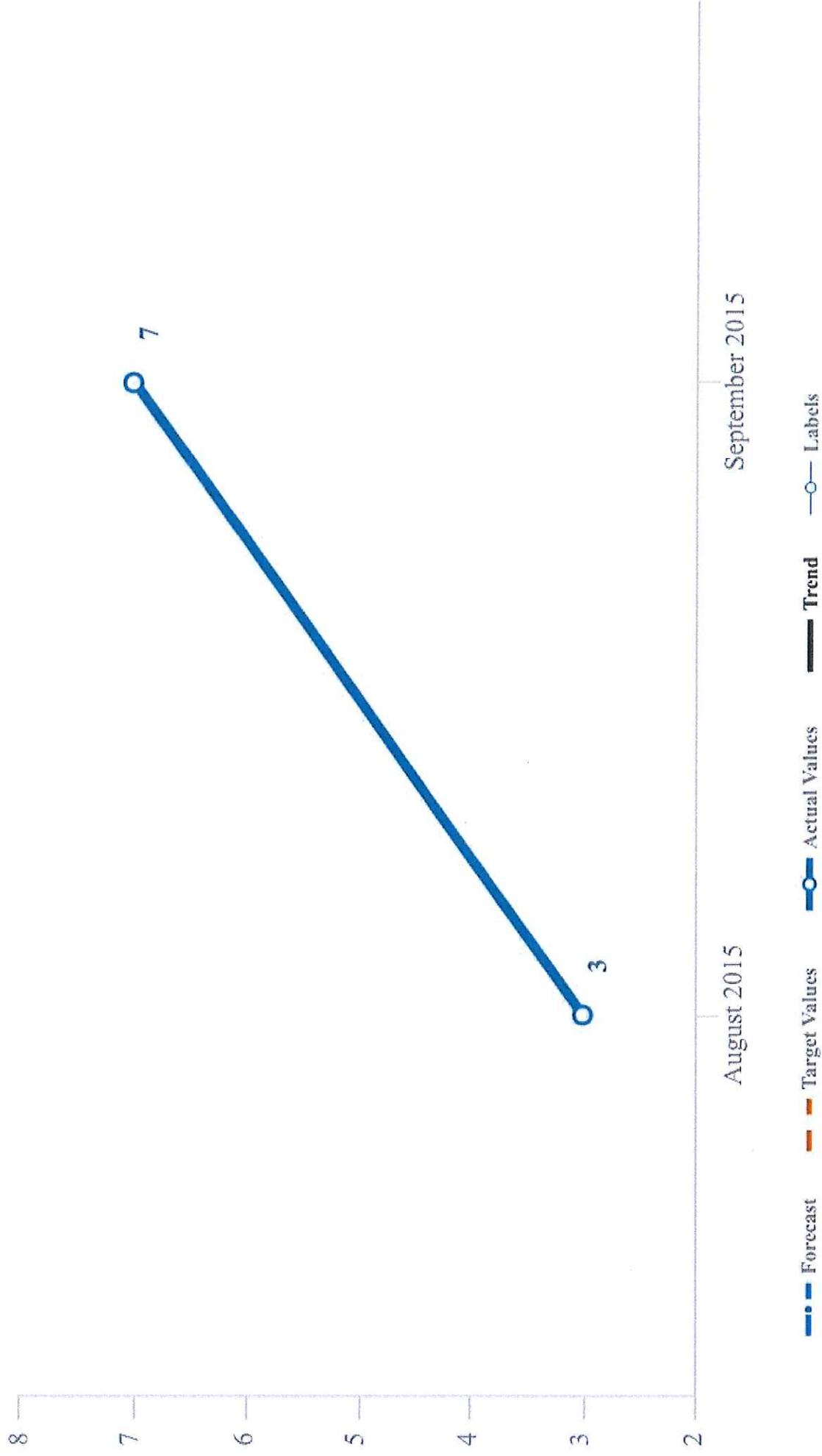
Number of young adults graduating from the program within the last thirty days.



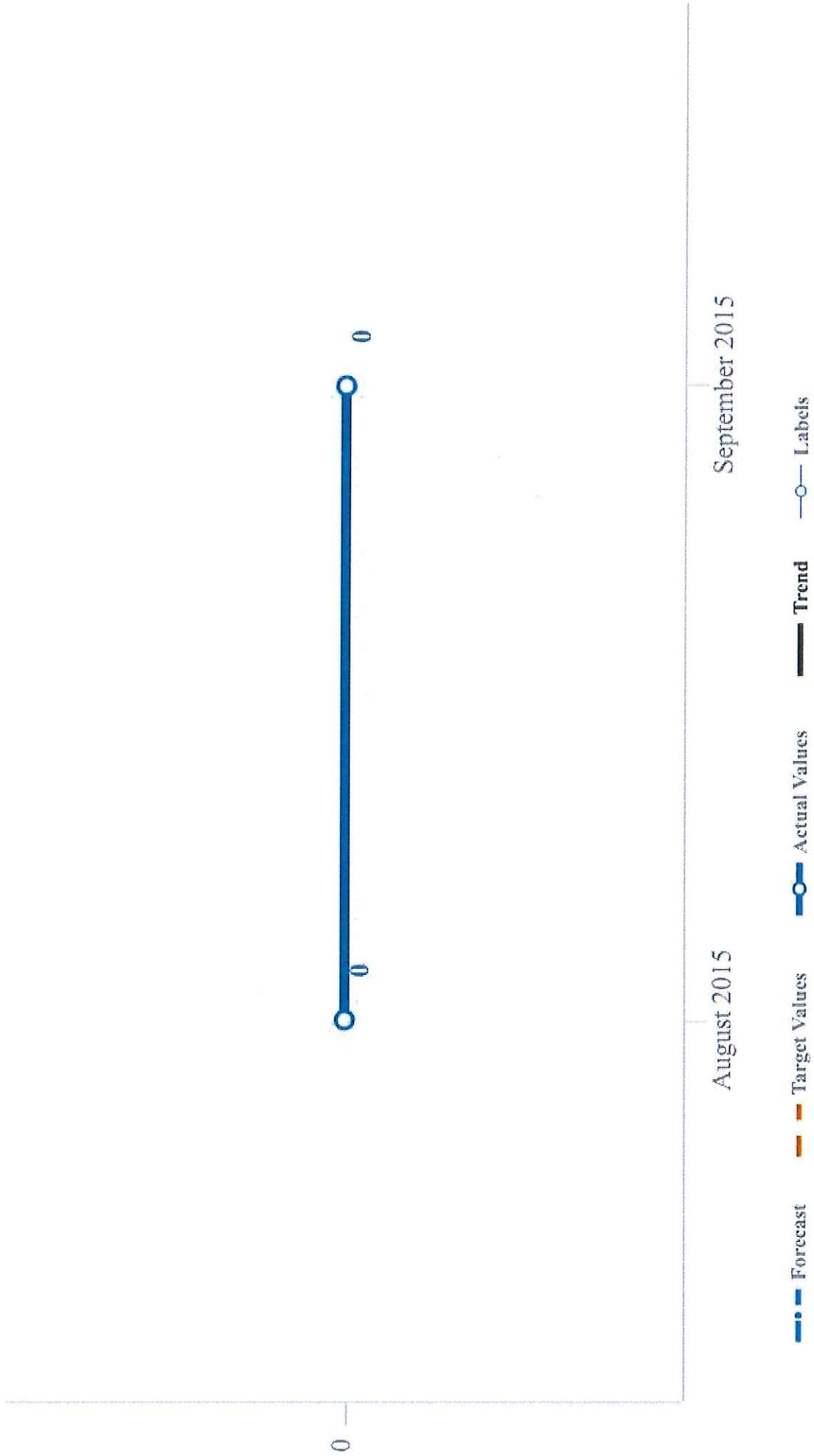
Number of young adults who applied for the Bridge to Independence Program within the last thirty days.



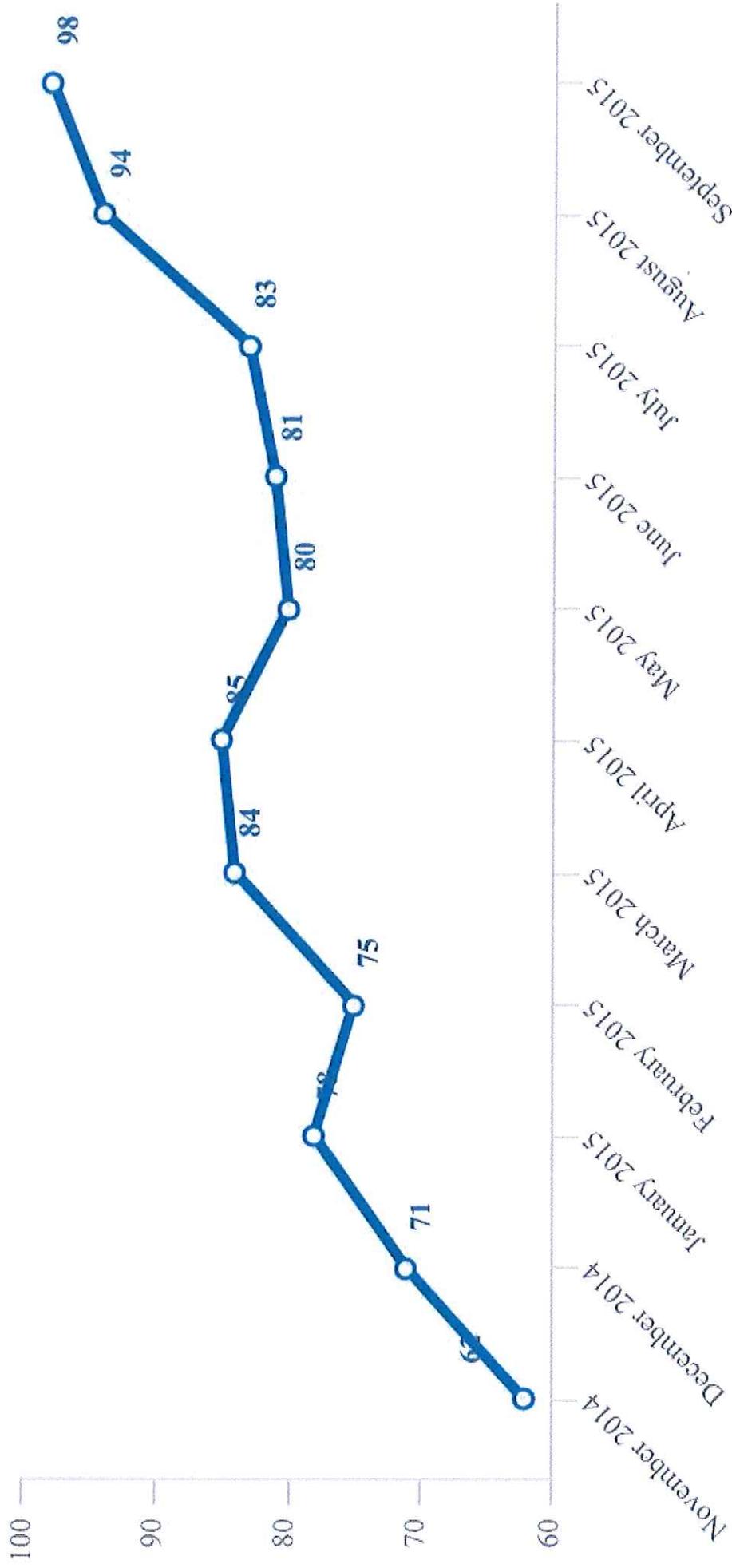
Number of young adults who are "couch surfing".



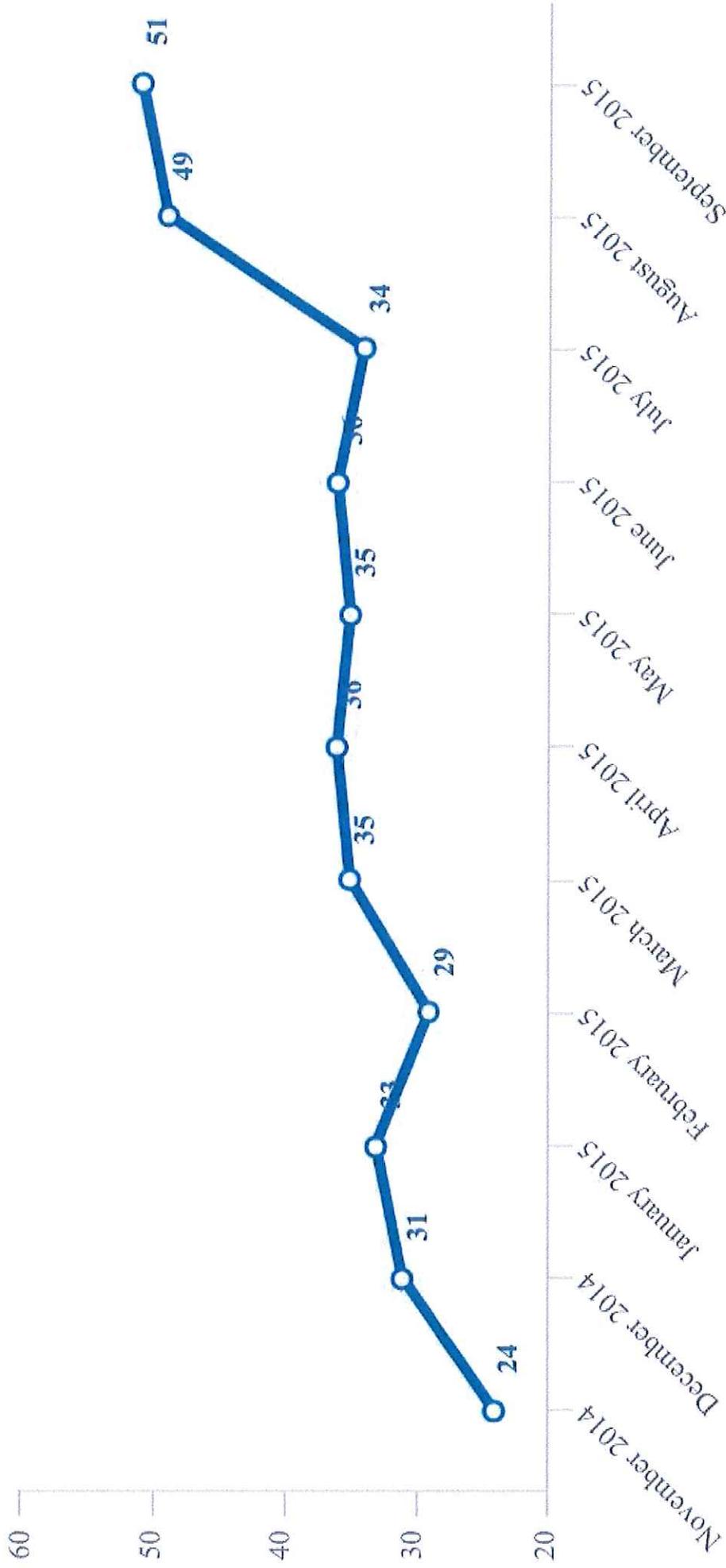
Number of young adults who are in a shelter.



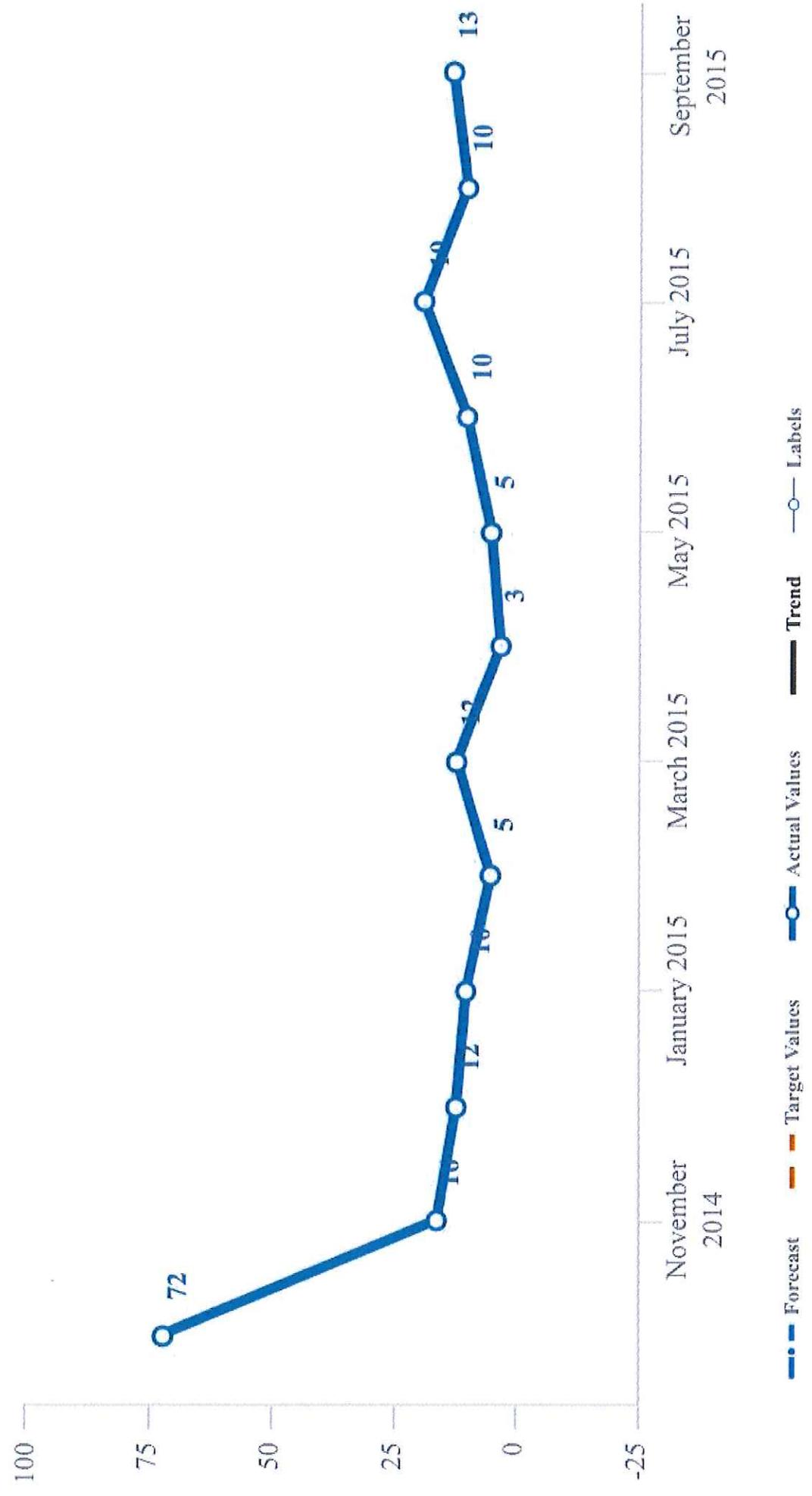
Number of young adults who had a mental health diagnosis while a State Ward



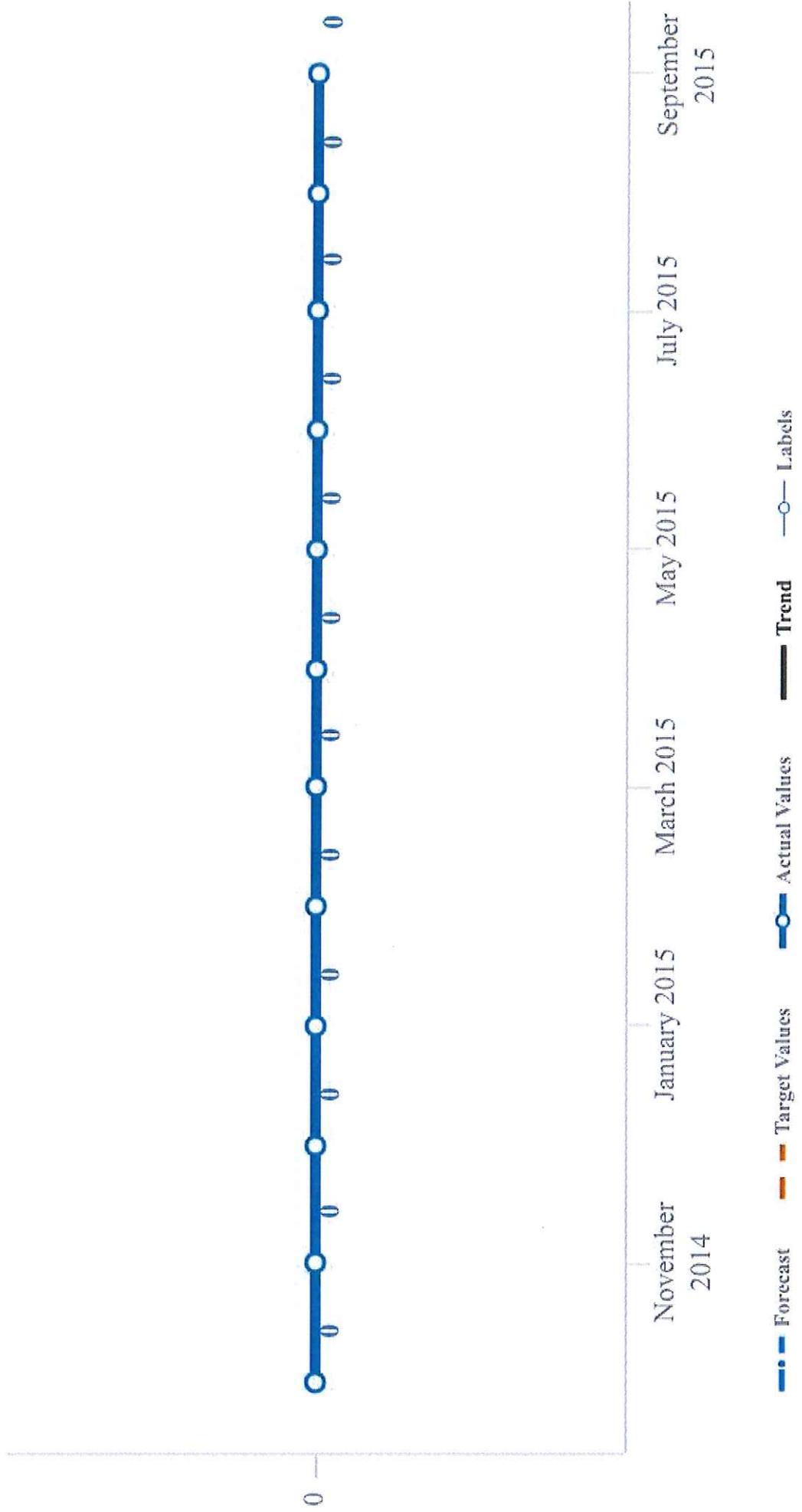
Number of young adults who had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) while a State Ward.



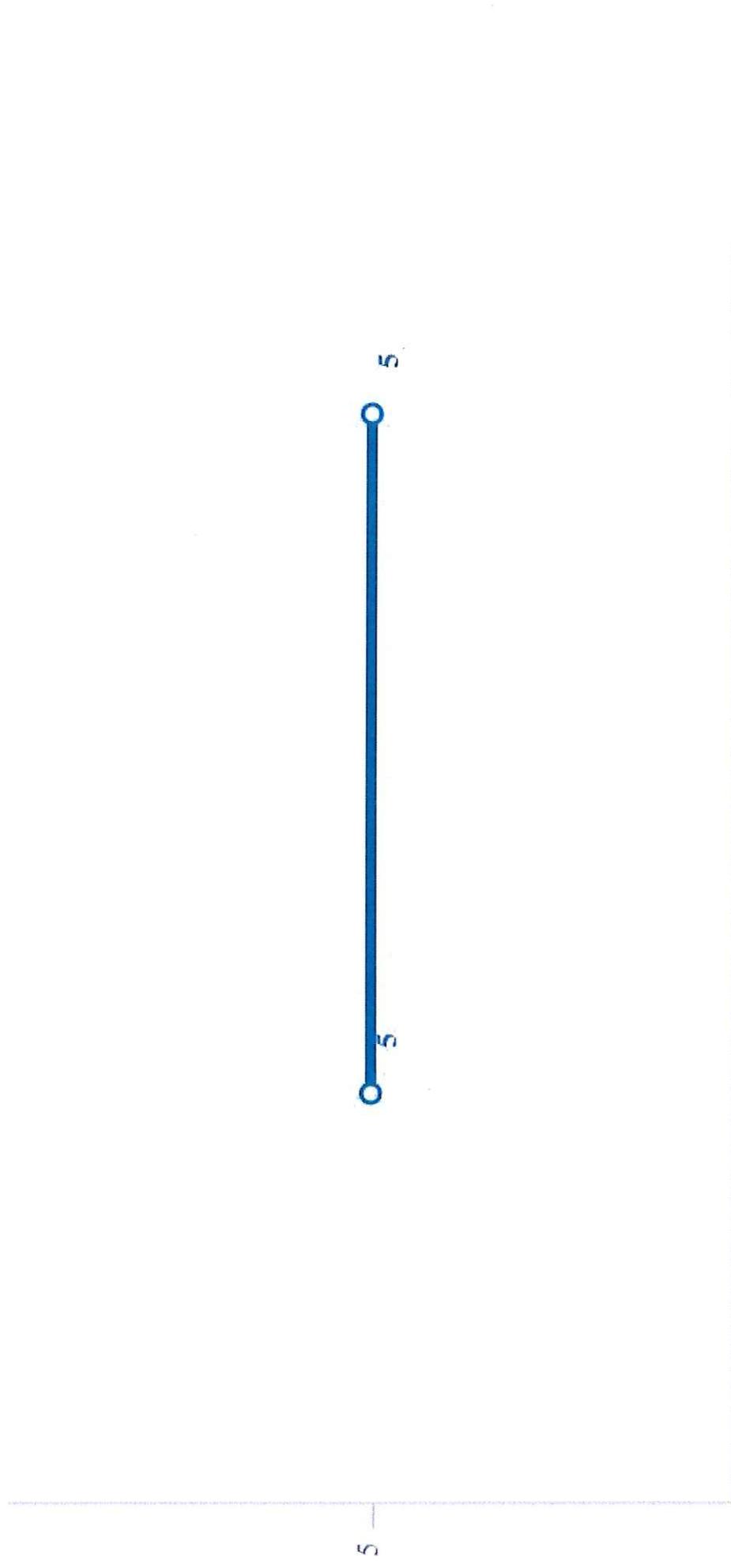
Number of young adults who signed a Voluntary Services and Support Agreement within the last month.



Number of young adults who terminated their membership within the last month.



Number of youth with a Letter of Entitlement



August 2015 September 2015

Forecast Target Values Actual Values Trend Labels

Percentage of enrollees in ESA and NSA.



Percentage of enrollees in SESA, CSA and WSA.



Percentage of females enrolled.



Percentage of males enrolled.



Percentage of young adults meeting the educational requirement within the last month.



Percentage of young adults meeting the employment requirement within the last month.



Percentage of young adults participating in the Program to Remove Barriers to Employment



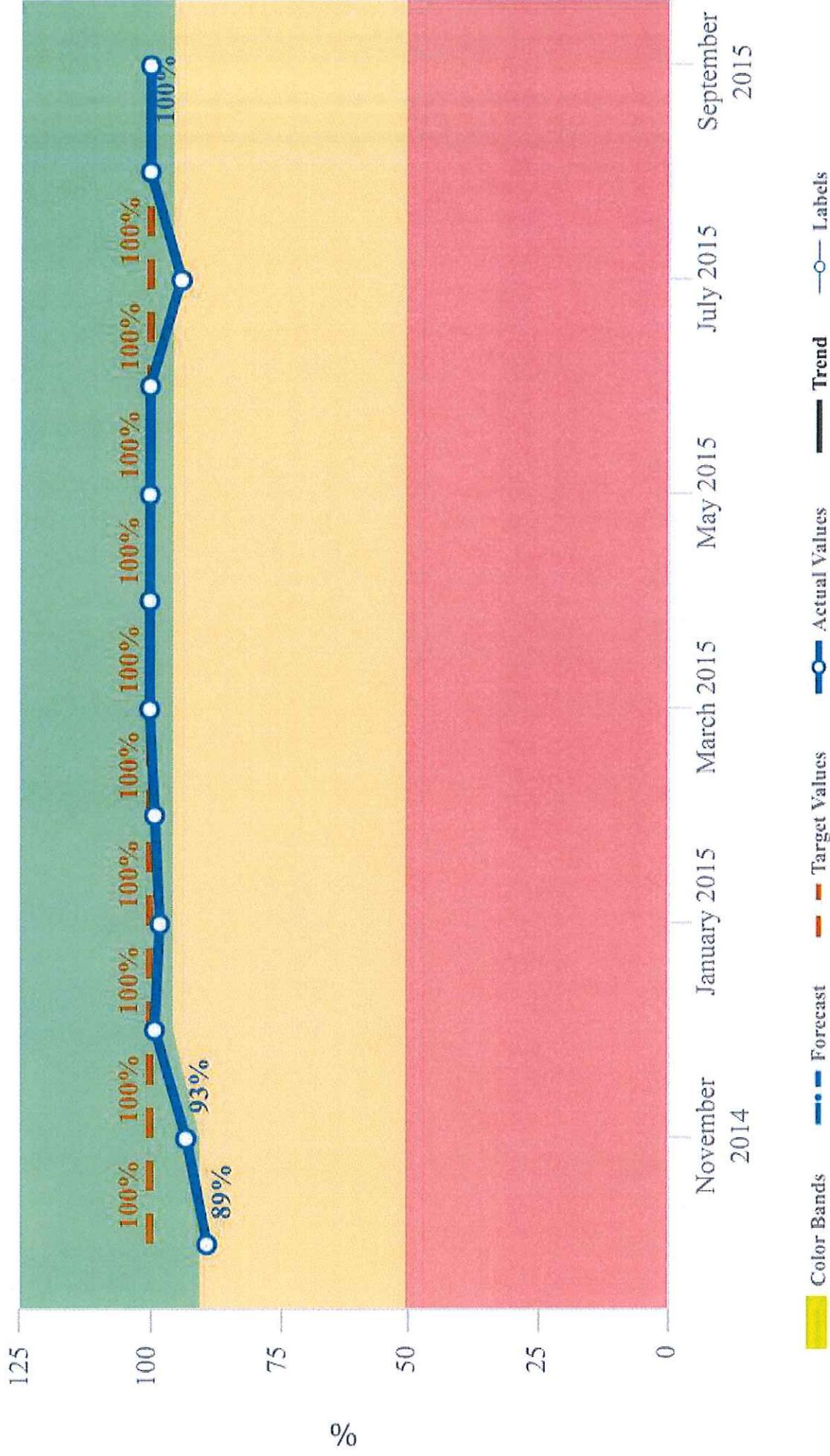
Percentage of young adults receiving Medicaid within the last month.



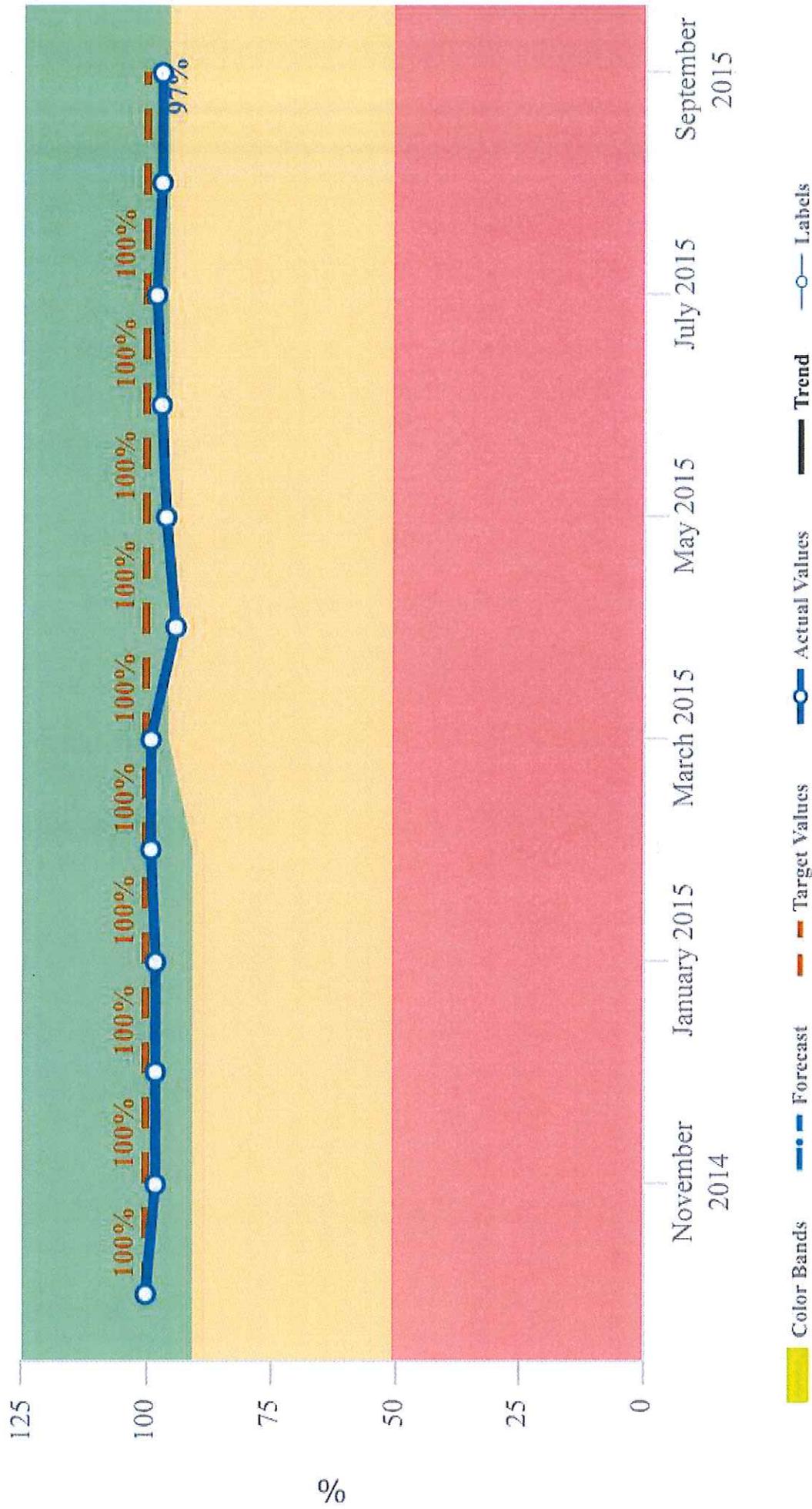
Percentage of young adults who are IV-E eligible



Percentage of young adults who have a Transition Living Plan.



Percentage of young adults who have had contact with their Independence Coordinator within the last thirty days.



Comments from the Young Adults

What is your favorite thing about the Bridge to Independence program?

My worker was VERY friendly and easy to talk to. I was only in it for a short time, however I feel as though BtoI gave me a new friend whom I can talk to if I have a need or to just talk to her in general.

What would you change about the Bridge to Independence program?

The length ~~of the program~~ ~~is~~ ~~too~~ ~~long~~ ~~for~~ ~~men/women~~ can be involved w/ it.

What is your favorite thing about the Bridge to Independence program?

The information, mentor, & ~~the~~ what the programs offer

What would you change about the Bridge to Independence program?

The age just for the reason listed in the ~~of~~ answer to the question above. I would have loved more time in the program.

"The Bridges to Independence Program has meant a lot to me because once I got pregnant I felt like I wasn't going to be able to help my daughter and wanted to give up. They gave me hope to try to do something better with my life than not do anything at all. I got into college again and for once I actually graduated a class instead of having to drop out of it. I didn't have much once I turned 19, I was released for the Cedars Independence Program with no place to go and having barely anything. I have been staying with family and now I am so close to getting my own place thanks to their help with what they gave me. They have helped me get the things I needed for my daughter because I didn't have anything for her but except for what a friend gave me. They have helped me look for places and have changed my outlook on life. They have helped me boost my self-esteem and help me reach for my goals I want. The worker they gave me to work with I feel really understands me and knows what I am going through. She has helped me feel like I am doing something right for me and my daughter. I have gotten close to her and she feels more like family because the only family I really have is my mom. Most of my family disowned me or hates me so when I have someone who makes me feel like I can do anything it makes me try harder. Even though the services stop for me once I turn 21 in April I still am thankful that I got the help that they have given me. I thank God for this opportunity and I would recommend it for other foster kids or those who have turned 19 that don't get much help."

Jackie Landgren

Tina Sondergoth

Human Services Concepts

February 18, 2015

The Bridge to Independence Program

The state of Nebraska has a certain reputation in that, because of the conservative values that residents hold, some proposed bills do not get passed, or take longer to go into effect. An example of this statement would be that to this day, there are 36 states that have legalized same-sex marriage... Nebraska not included.

Although conservative Nebraskans receive criticism from liberals about many issues, it's safe to say that Nebraskans aren't all bad. Yes, you read that right... even Nebraska has positive qualities about their laws and regulations. One good thing Nebraska has done fairly recently would be the upgrading of the way Nebraska handles a state ward after they have aged out or had their case closed prior to that.

You see, it all began with a bill passed in 2013 (known at that time as the Young Adult Voluntary Supports and Services Act) that changed the playing field for former state wards. This bill, which they renamed Bridge to Independence, gives individuals from age 19 to 21 enough independence to feel comfortable, but also lends a helping hand their way when they have troubles. This program is

part of DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services) but is completely voluntary. The contact information for B2I is the following:

Address: 301 Centennial Mall South

P.O. Box 95026

Lincoln, NE 68509

Phone number: 402-471-9331

Getting into the program is fairly easy. The only concern that comes up is that only those who are 19-21 years of age are eligible, but it is the state's responsibility to lay out options for adolescents as they come closer and closer to aging out of the state ward and/or foster care system. For example, in my case as a former state ward, before my time was up, so to speak, I was informed about the Bridge to Independence program and was interested immediately. In order to be in the program, youth must fall under at least one or more of the criteria listed on the website, which includes these important guidelines:

- Youth aged out of foster care in a placement that is not their original home.
- Youth was discharged into independent living from foster care.
- Youth was adopted at 16 years or older from foster care.
- Youth entered a guardianship agreement at 16 years or older.

The important thing to understand is that foster care plays a huge role in eligibility. In my case, I was in a foster home when I aged out of the system, which is why I was able to be in B2I. This program is extremely helpful to young adults entering

independence for the first time. Youth are assigned an Independence Coordinator (IC) and are required to meet with their worker *at least once a month* to give updates of what they have been accomplishing. In order to stay in the program once you're officially in it, you must be working, attending college or G.E.D. classes, or volunteering at least part-time. As long as the client can provide proof of work or school every 6 months, they will remain in the program. In addition, young adults in the program are guaranteed medical coverage from Medicaid and receive a monthly stipend from DHHS of \$760, which can come via check or direct deposit.

This stipend means that youth can work or go to school part-time and still have plenty of time to study, relax, or hang out with friends. Because B2I is voluntary, and because the youth are legal adults under Nebraska law, IC workers are limited on the things they can do. A case worker, for example, who is working with a state ward, is given permission to disclose information to their parents or other adults they are working with. There is no sense of privacy, because there really isn't any. Case workers are the state ward's guardian, which means they oversee all types of care received by the youth. The IC worker, on the flip side, is simply there to provide support and help locate resources for the young adult's situation.

Personally, my IC and I keep in contact through text and phone calls, and I utilize her services multiple times per month if needed. That's the beautiful thing about the program -- the clients decide how many meetings are needed. It could be once a week, twice a week, or more, depending on the IC's schedule and the client's. Workers are trained in the human services field, thus are supportive, helpful, and willing to go the

extra mile to make sure young adults are living comfortably. They can assist you in signing up for EBT benefits, help you find housing, get into school or a job. They can even extend their help to any of the youth's significant others, though they are not required to.

Another good thing about B2I is that should you lose employment or student status, you have 30 days to find another job or school/classes you can attend. If you have not found anything within 30 days, you are sent a letter notifying you of your impending discharge, but even then, depending on your situation, you can get more time. Usually, if a youth has been keeping in contact with their IC, both parties can come up with a game plan and snag another job or school opportunity.

Overall, the Bridge to Independence program is a major improvement of after-care services for young adults who have been in the foster care system. It gives them a chance to adjust and feel independent, while having someone supportive by their side to give them guidance along the way, if needed. I'm confident that down the road, Nebraska will have more ideas and implement them as much as possible to give youth transitioning into adulthood a chance to adjust and chase their dreams.

Works Cited

Brakhage, Deanna. "The Bridge to Independence Program." *DHHS*. Last updated 26 January 2015. Web. 16 February 2015. <<http://goo.gl/XS7652>>

URL provided is a shortcut to the official website for B2I. You may not find the same information that I have given in this paper on the website, but the website is rather vague, which was why I provided more details from personal experience.

Reported Experiences

- We are working with one youth that did not have a lot of focus or a solid plan for what he wanted to do when he started the B2i program. Since joining the program and receiving the support and guidance from his Independence Coordinator, he has made tremendous progress in his life. This young man was able to work his way through and obtain his GED. He faced some challenges with family members using drugs and not being positive supports for him. After processing through this situation with his IC and others, he was able to step away from those relationships in order to keep focusing on the positive direction of his life. Since then, the Independence Coordinator connected the young man with a new organization, the Bike Union Mentoring Project (BUMP), which combines a coffee shop along with a business that refurbishes and then sells used bicycles. The young man was hired there and has developed a mentoring relationship with the program directors at BUMP. Last week, the IC helped this young man find and obtain his first apartment!
- One Independence Coordinator (IC) has worked with a young lady dealing with very challenging circumstances over the last year. The young lady was on a positive track when she joined the program, attending high school and planned to graduate. She soon got involved with an older man who the IC believed to be taking advantage, manipulating, and mistreating her. Over many months and many conversations, the IC had to remain positive and supportive to the young lady while also expressing the concerns for the young lady's wellbeing that were apparent to the IC. There was a period when the young lady was very resistant, likely due to her "boyfriend's" manipulation, and did not want to continue working with the IC. The IC was able to keep her minimally engaged while continuing to meet the program requirements. Since that low point, the young lady has recognized the negative relationship with her "boyfriend" and called the IC in a time of crisis when trying to leave. The IC helped the young lady move to a different city to live with people who are supportive of her, as well as obtain a protection order. The young lady is now re-enrolled in high school and is looking forward to graduation.
- A Independence Coordinator (IC) was able to help out a young adult with automobile issues. She was having some minor issues with her car and did not know who she could trust to look at her car. The IC knew some contacts that were auto mechanics. They were past HHS/YRTC employees who owned their own automotive business. They were willing to help the young adult with her car.

They have also agreed to help out any other Bridge young adults who need automotive assistance.

- When the Independence Coordinator (IC) received her first cases, one of the young adults was soon to leave foster care. The young adult had ran from placement and been missing for months with little to no contact. The IC collaborated with the Family Permanency Specialist and identified a phone number for someone that knew the young adult. The IC was able to get a message to the young adult, who then reached out and contacted the IC for information about the Bridge to Independence program. The IC found out that the young man had ran away to New Orleans and planned to stay there indefinitely. The IC was able to engage him over the phone, explain the Bridge to Independence program, and get him interested in participating. Despite past frustrations while a state ward, the young man quickly developed a rapport with the IC and agreed that she could visit him and that he would follow the requirements of the program. Even though he spent his last months in state care as a “runaway”, the IC was able to help ensure he was safe and supported as he transitioned to adulthood.
- An Independent Coordinator (IC) is working with a young lady who broke her leg during the weekend of October 3, 2014. Because of the relationship that had been established, the young lady contacted the IC, who helped her with the Emergency Room process and also took her to her follow up appointment. The IC has done a great job building rapport with this young lady and was also able to help this young lady find additional clothing for a job interview and other needed resources in the community.
- An Independence Coordinator (IC) is working with a young lady who lives in her own apartment. The young lady called the IC in tears, saying that she had received a three-day notice to pay her late rent for the month or be evicted from the complex. The young lady did not have the money to pay the rent. The IC was able to calm her down and discuss the situation. The IC helped her to contact the apartment complex to discuss repayment options to prevent the eviction, and also reached out to contacts and community resources that might be able to assist with the late rent payment. The IC was able to connect the young lady with a housing program through a service provider that is specifically focused on helping former state wards. The program agreed to pay the overdue rent as well as accept the young lady into their program, which includes ongoing rental voucher assistance. The IC is working with the young lady to obtain employment and budget for expenses. The Supervisor believes the IC’s assistance was essential to preventing

an immediate eviction and will keep this young adult in stable, independent housing.

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) was trying to assist a young adult to apply for Medicaid. The young adult was having problems applying. The IC took his laptop and met the young adult to help him sign up on-line. This young man now has medical coverage.
- An Independence Coordinator (IC) participated in a meeting with a young man and his grandmother. His grandmother was very upset with the young man and wanted to kick him out of her house because he never cleaned his room. The IC was able to help this young man budget and buy some storage totes and assisted him with organizing his room. The grandmother was very impressed and happy with the help from the IC and is now willing to let her grandson continue to live with her.
- The Independence Coordinator (IC) is working with a young woman in college who currently has approximately \$1,500 in debt to multiple places. Prior to joining Bridge to Independence, the young adult had a bank account that she overdrew resulting in overdraft fees. The young woman chose to ignore this instead of repaying it. She was also in debt and past due to her cellular provider, insurance provider for her vehicle, licensing and registration for her vehicle, and had unpaid parking tickets in Nebraska and Colorado. The young adult did not have a clear grasp of how much she owed and to whom. The IC went with the young adult to the bank to discuss the negative balance and develop a plan for repayment. The IC also identified how much the young adult owed for parking tickets and how to go about paying them. The IC worked with the young adult to create a budget for repaying the debt, reestablishing the bank account, and licensing, registering, and insuring her vehicle. By following this budget and using Bridge to Independence funds along with other income, the young adult has been able to begin repaying and cut the debt in half in the month of October. The IC will continue to work on budgeting and money management with this young adult in the future.
- An Independence Coordinator (IC) went to visit with a young adult that had lost her sister and was on her way out of town to go to the funeral with her family. The IC and the young adult sat in her living room, and the IC listened patiently as the young adult let everything out and cried about her feelings with her sister's

tragic passing, and the fact that her mother had also lost a husband the same way. Together they talked through the emotions that the young adult felt about having to go and spend the weekend with family she was not excited about seeing, and also visited with the IC about how she had to be strong for her mom in her time of need. After a long period of time and many tears, the young adult said "Thank You". The IC smiled and with tears in her eyes, asked "Thank you for what?" The young adult answered, "For just being here and listening". The young adult went on to say that she tried very hard to cut out old friends in her life as she had learned that they were not good influences. It was a very good conversation and the IC believed it made their relationship grow stronger.

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) was working with a young lady who had been in need of dental work. When the IC began working with her, the young lady did not have Medicaid or private health insurance. The IC immediately focused on fixing the issue preventing the young lady from receiving Medicaid, and collaborated with representatives in the Medicaid division to get the young lady enrolled. The young lady was able to schedule her needed dental work this week. The IC assisted her in getting to and from the dental procedure, and even went to the grocery store to get her some chicken noodle soup and apple juice to help her recover. The young lady has to return next week for additional dental work, and the IC will be there to support her again. This young adult was very appreciative of the IC's support and assistance during these dental procedures!
- An Independence Coordinator (IC) and a young adult had a follow-up team meeting. At the prior team meeting, there were concerns both at home and at his job site. During the follow-up team meeting, the young adult reported his progress efforts. The job site instructor, the young adult's mother and grandmother all agreed that the young adult had managed an amazing turn around. The young adult was very proud of his accomplishments and additionally reported that he had successfully secured a part time job at a local restaurant. When asked how he turned all of this around, the young adult stated that during the last team meeting he realized that he had a whole team of people believing in him and supporting him and that is why he was able to turn things around for himself.
- The Independence Coordinator (IC) signed a young adult up for Medicaid. The young adult had been struggling with the application process and wanted to give up on getting medical coverage. With the help of the IC, Medicaid is now active for this young adult.

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) was assigned two new cases at once, a husband and wife (and their young child) who were both former wards eligible for Bridge to Independence. The IC scheduled to meet them on a Friday, explain the program requirements, and possibly get them signed up at that time. When the IC arrived at the meeting with the young adults, he found out that their living arrangement with an acquaintance had fallen through and the family was essentially homeless. The family was worried about where they could stay, if they could keep their child safe and warm for the night, and whether their lack of shelter would result in a call to the Abuse and Neglect Hotline. The IC was able to immediately work with the family on a crisis plan for the weekend as well as a plan for the future. Fortunately, one of the young adults had a steady income. The IC was able to calm their concerns and help them find a safe and affordable hotel for the family to stay in for the weekend. The IC ensured that the family had access to food and other essentials for the weekend. The IC worked with the family to contact landlords who offered affordable income-based apartments, and helped the family in visiting and obtaining their own apartment. The IC was able to get the family into the Bridge to Independence program as soon as possible so they could receive the monthly maintenance payments to use toward their own independent housing. The IC was calm and adaptable in responding to this crisis situation, and helped ensure the parents and their child remained safe and warm despite the cold weather.
- The Independence Coordinator (IC) was working with a young lady and her boyfriend in northeastern Nebraska. The young lady had about two months left in her pregnancy before giving birth to the couple's first child. The young woman and her boyfriend were excited about the baby, but also very nervous. The IC had observed that they could use a strong support system and had a lot to learn about parenting, as any young parents would. Their family support system in the area was very limited, and the young woman had come to depend on the IC for support. The IC had been looking for community resources that might be beneficial to the young lady and her boyfriend, and recently found the local Community Action Partnership. The program provided one on one home visits that focused on parenting education and support. The IC reached out to the agency and found they would be eager to work with the young family. The IC was able to connect the Community Action Partnership with the young woman and her boyfriend, and they are now set up to begin working with the partnership. Through the IC's efforts, the parents-to-be were able to strengthen and add to their support network and will learn to be safe and effective parents.
- The Independence Coordinator (IC) worked with a young adult to enroll at Joseph's College of Hair Design, which included: attending the enrollment

meeting at the school, assisting the young adult with completion of the paper work required and also applying for financial aid. The young adult is the first one in the family to ever make it past a middle school education and is excited to start a new adventure. The young adult told the IC, "If you wouldn't have been here to push me to do better with my life, I would have never thought this possible".

- One of the young adults gave birth to her first baby boy in October 2015. The Independence Coordinator was able to assist with getting needed items for her from the HOPE CHEST such as; clothing, diapers, a car seat, stroller, bouncer, baby wipes, bottles and blankets. Together, they also found a number of different community resources that she can use in the weeks to come to assist her with her new born baby.
- An Independence Coordinator (IC) formed a relationship and worked with a young lady who got married!!!! This young lady has been an amazing success story and has truly turned her life around. This young lady invited the IC to her wedding reception, and the IC attended. This young lady was overjoyed and hugged the IC and told her "Thank you so much for coming". She went on to tell the IC that her mom missed her wedding because she had passed out (her mom has a very long history of alcoholism). With tears in her eyes she told the IC that she was done letting her mom ruin her life and make her unhappy! She said the best thing that her mom did for her was to make her eligible for the B2i program therefore she was able to meet the IC and have a lifelong support and friend!
- An Independence Coordinator (IC) had been working with a young adult since June 2015, prior to officially enrolling in the B2i program. The young adult consistently reported that he was going to attend Metro Community College for Culinary Arts. The IC met with the young adult on August 24, 2015 and he continued to report the same plan as previously discussed. However, the young adult and the IC checked his enrollment status on a laptop the IC brought. They were not able to log on to his Community College account. The young adult tried to locate his log on information, but was unable to do so. The young adult informed the IC that he could not locate his log on information, so the IC transported the young adult to the Student Services Office at the Community College. The guidance counselor advised the youth that the day was the last day to register for classes. His guidance counselor was able to register the young adult for 12.5 credit hours. The IC then accompanied the youth to the Community College Financial Aid Office and provided necessary documentation for the youth's Pell Grants and financial assistance. The Independence Coordinator was

also able to help the young adult obtain a \$500.00 Needs Based Fund grant through Project Everlast, so he could get a laptop computer for school.

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) had been working with a B2i young adult that decided to quit his job and travel to Connecticut for a 2 month long vacation. The young adult returned approximately 3 weeks later, still without a job. The IC continued to offer the young adult assistance in job hunting, but he refused. The young adult had been previously working with the Heartland Workforce Solutions, but had not returned for continued support since leaving for Connecticut. The IC met with the young adult and informed him that they were going to the Heartland Workforce Solutions; the young adult was resistant, but agreed to go. Upon arrival, the young adult met with a Project Employment Specialist. The young adult updated his resume and completed an online application for Oriental Trading Company. After leaving The Heartland Workforce Solutions, the young adult received a call from Oriental Trading Company within hours of submitting his application, for an interview. The support of the B2i program was able to bring the young adult into contact with local resources to assist in living a more independent life.