

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

August 7, 2017

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Lincoln Community Foundation, 5th Floor Conference Room

215 Centennial Mall S, Lincoln, NE 68508

**Video Conference Satellite Locations:**

KVC Nebraska, 11550 I St #100, Omaha, NE 68137

CAPWN, 3350 10th Street, Gering, NE 69341

**I. Call to Order and Welcome**

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Co-Chairs, Jeanne Brandner and Mary Jo Pankoke, called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 2:05 p.m. They welcomed everyone and the group did formal introductions.

**II. Roll Call and Introductions**

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**Committee Members present (15):**

Nedhal Al-Kazahy	Brandy Gustoff	Jennifer Skala (arrived 3:32)
Jodie Austin*	Sarah Helvey	Julia Tse**
Sebastian Coolidge	Doug Lenz	Lana Verbrigghe
Vernon Davis	Mary Jo Pankoke	
Mary Fraser Meints	Jill Schubauer	
Alyson Goedken	Deb Shuck*	

**Committee Members absent (1):**

Susan Thomas

**Ex-Officio Members present (1):**

Jeanne Brandner

**Ex-Officio Members absent (6):**

Senator Kate Bolz	Timoree Klingler	Kim Thomas
Judge Douglas Johnson	Katie McLeese Stephenson	Deb VanDyke-Ries

A quorum was established.

**Guests in Attendance (10):**

Kayla Bailey*	Project Everlast
Cassy Blakely	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Deanna Brakhage	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Becca Brune	Nebraska Appleseed
Claire Buddenberg	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Bethany Connor Allen	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Amanda Felton	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Jessica Hilderbrand	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Felipe Longoria	Central Plains Center for Service
Bobbi Taylor	Project Everlast

\*Members and guests attending via satellite locations

\*\*Julia Tse served as a temporary proxy designated by Juliet Summers

*a. Notice of Publication*

Recorder for the meeting, Amanda Felton, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meetings Calendar and Nebraska Children’s Commission website in

accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. The publication would be kept as a permanent attachment with the meeting minutes.

*b. Announcement of the placement of Open Meetings Act information*

A copy of the Open Meetings Act was available for public inspection and was located on the table near the entrance of the meeting room.

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**III. Approval of Agenda**

**It was moved by Mary Fraser Meints and seconded by Doug Lenz to approve the agenda as presented.** There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (14):**

Nedhal Al-Kazahy	Alyson Goedken	Jill Schubauer
Jodie Austin	Brandy Gustoff	Deb Shuck
Sebastian Coolidge	Sarah Helvey	Julia Tse
Vernon Davis	Doug Lenz	Lana Verbrigghe
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (2):**

Jennifer Skala	Susan Thomas
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**MOTION CARRIED**

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**IV. Approval of Minutes**

**It was moved by Sarah Helvey to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2017 minutes as presented. It was seconded by Brandy Gustoff.** There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (11):**

Vernon Davis	Sarah Helvey	Deb Shuck
Mary Fraser Meints	Doug Lenz	Julia Tse
Alyson Goedken	Mary Jo Pankoke	Lana Verbrigghe
Brandy Gustoff	Jill Schubauer	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (3):**

Nedhal Al-Kazahy	Jodie Austin	Sebastian Coolidge
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**ABSENT (2):**

Jennifer Skala	Susan Thomas
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**MOTION CARRIED**

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**V. DHHS Update**

*a. Program Regulation and Legislative Discussion*

Alyson Goedken, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Administrator, began by reviewing the recent [Executive Order](#) from the Governor regarding state regulations. She noted that the next several weeks would consist of a review of both the promulgated and proposed B2i program regulations to ensure that they were in alignment with the order. Any changes deemed necessary would undergo the standard process of posting and public hearing for feedback. A request was made to have a copy of the proposed regulation changes shared with the Committee and Ms. Goedken expressed that she would share those with the group.

Ms. Goedken continued by discussing the potential legislative items for program improvement. Preliminary discussion included eligibility criteria for entering the B2i program, specifically a change to allow participation for young adults adjudicated under section 7 of [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-247](#). This would include youth whose parents voluntarily relinquished their parental rights to DHHS and that would not have an abuse and neglect charge associated with their case. Members agreed that it would be beneficial to expand eligibility criteria to include this youth and were pleased that the Department was looking into it.

The members also discussed the cases where guardianships and adoptions are disrupted. There was consensus that these youth should also be eligible for the B2i program. After lengthy discussion, **it was moved by Sarah Helvey to recommend a legislative proposal to include young adults with disrupted adoptions and guardianships as eligible for enrollment in the Bridge to Independence program. Mary Fraser Meints seconded the motion.** No further discussion ensued. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (12):**

Jodie Austin	Sarah Helvey	Julia Tse
Vernon Davis	Doug Lenz	Lana Verbrigghe
Mary Fraser Meints	Mary Jo Pankoke	
Alyson Goedken	Jill Schubauer	
Brandy Gustoff	Deb Shuck	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (2):**

Nedhal Al-Kazahy	Sebastian Coolidge
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**ABSENT (2):**

Jennifer Skala	Susan Thomas
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**MOTION CARRIED**

Another area being investigated for potential legislative adjustment was increasing flexibility for termination from the program. Currently there are set restrictions for removal from the program all of which relate to eligibility criteria. Situations had arisen where workers were occasionally put in situation where their health and safety may have been at risk. Due to the limitations of the termination guidelines, there was no way to prevent the workforce from having to continue to associate with the participants who may have put the worker's safety at risk. This issue was still in the preliminary phase and language surrounding how this would be included had yet to be drafted.

Co-Chair Brandner inquired into as to if any work had been done surrounding the stipend program participants received for their dependents. Ms. Goedken explained that the dependent stipend was required to mirror the payments the young adult would have received while in foster care. The legal division was looking into the issue.

*b. Review of Budget Status*

Ms. Goedken shared details relating to fiscal year 2016. She explained that the program had been appropriated \$1.7 million from general funds and just shy of \$2 million from federal funds. Actual expenditures for 2016 was slightly over \$2.6 million, with a majority of the funds going directly to stipends for participants. She went on to explain that the federal funding was mostly IV-E funds that were eligible to be claimed. As discussed at previous meetings, the program had not been able to maximize the amount of IV-E funds as they had originally anticipated, and because of such, were not able to receive all of the appropriated federal funds.

Ms. Goedken further broke down the expenditures explaining that about \$2 million of the funding came from state general funds with just over \$600,000 coming from federal funds. Members expressed

interest in knowing how much IV-E funding had been claimed. There was also interest to know if the overages in general funds was solved through a deficit request or a shift of funds from other sources. Members expressed interest in knowing several other items including the cumulative number of youth who have utilized the program throughout its life, an average annual participant count, how many participant dependents were receiving stipend funds, how many developmentally disabled youth were participating in the program, age of enrollment, age of discharge, and the length of stay with the program. Expanding on length of stay, the members asked to know the total number of months the program was accessed, the number of youth going in and out of the program, and the reasons for youth coming and going from the program.

The group went on to discuss the need for financial education for the participants as well as a need to identify the services utilized by the young adults. Ms. Goedken informed the Committee that the first ever Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) packet for the B2i program had been created in June. The packet and data would be refined over the next several months. While currently only shared internally, once data and format had been finalized, there was hope to share the data on a larger scale. Information being tracked included participants qualifying for IV-E funding, participants receiving funding from other programs such as SNAP and TANF.

*c. Implementation Challenges for Feedback*

The Barriers to Employment Population continued to prove to be a challenging population within the program. Ms. Brakhage expressed the difficulty in keeping these young adults motivated especially when they may not have extensive knowledge of soft skills or when employers cannot provide them with consistent hours of work.

Members inquired if the Barriers population would qualify for opportunities with Goodwill, Vocational Rehabilitation, and other such programs. If young adults were accessing employment resources, then we needed to look at why they cannot find successful employment. An entrance survey was suggested to provide an idea of the skills young adults are bringing with them when entering the program and help identify areas of focus for future goals. It was agreed, that no matter the route taken to help this population, a balance needed to be found between independence and oversight in order to prepare these young adults for a successful transition out of the program.

*d. Stipend Payment Research Update*

Deanna Brakhage, DHHS Program Specialist, shared a [handout](#) comparing the stipend payments for extended foster care programs in various states. Connecticut in particular stood out as they paid their young adults to attend college. Ms. Brakhage noted that some of the states require their participants to submit budgets, requiring receipts for how money was spent was not required. The group discussed the potential for a required financial education class. Ms. Brakhage noted the most significant difference between most states and Nebraska was the large stipend for dependent children of participants. Nebraska's stipend dependents was currently \$620 per child per month.

*e. Staffing and Turnover Update*

Ms. Goedken was happy to share with the Committee that the program was currently fully staffed. Caseload size still sat around 22 cases per Independence Coordinator, but once the new workers were fully trained the caseload numbers would even out.

## **VI. IV-E Penetration Rate Update**

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Ms. Goedken remarked that progress was continuing after the approval of the state plan amendment that allowed IV-E eligibility to be determined at the time of entering B2i at age 19. A partnership had begun with Economic Assistance. Complications had arisen in streamlining the process for obtaining required documentation. Often the young adults did not realize the importance of getting required documentation to their Independence Coordinators, which could cause the loss of IV-E funds. The Department was considering

inclusion of a release of documentation within the initial forms completed by participants, allowing them to access the forms necessary to determine IV-E eligibility and access those funds.

### **VII. Annual Report Discussion**

Co-Chair Pankoke reminded members of the requirement for an annual report. The Committee would have one final meeting prior to the report being submitted to the Nebraska Children's Commission for approval at their November 14<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### **VIII. Public Comment**

Co-Chair Pankoke opened the floor for public comment. There was no public comment.

### **IX. New Business**

There was no new business.

### **X. Upcoming Meeting Planning**

A doodle poll would be sent out to members to find a time in late September or early October for the next meeting of the Committee.

### **XI. Adjourn**

**It was moved by Brandy Gustoff and seconded by Vernon Davis to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.** The meeting adjourned at 4:02 p.m.

8/16/2017

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