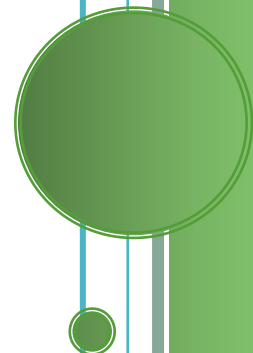


NEBRASKA CHILDREN'S COMMISSION 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

*Submitted to the Governor and Health and Human Services Committee of
the Legislature Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4207*

November 2017



Nebraska Children's Commission 2017 Annual Report

*SUBMITTED TO THE GOVERNOR AND HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATURE PURSUANT TO NEB. REV. STAT. §43-4207*

Nebraska Children's Commission Mission Statement

The Nebraska Children's Commission works as a high-level leadership body with membership from the legislative, executive, and judicial branches along with system stakeholders to improve the safety and well-being of all children and families in Nebraska.

Background

The Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission) was created in 2012 by the Nebraska State Legislature as a leadership forum for collaboration on child welfare and juvenile justice reform among the three branches of government and public and private stakeholders at the state, regional, and community level. The leadership and vision of Commission members allows the body to take a long-term view of investment in children and families to create a healthy vibrant state where all children and families reach their full potential.

The Commission functions as a dynamic, high-level leadership body and permanent forum for collaboration among state, local, community, public, and private stakeholders in child welfare and juvenile justice programs and services. The Commission's sunset date has been extended by the legislature twice, most recently in the 2016 legislative session, and is currently set to sunset June 30, 2019. Over 250 stakeholders and community members across the state participate in the Commission's initiatives, which have significant impact on child welfare and juvenile justice policy and legislation. The Commission is the only statutory body that is tasked with working with all branches of government on these issues, and has consistently been tasked with additional duties to improve outcomes for children and families in Nebraska.

Activities

The Commission has been highly active in 2017, meeting five times. The Commission welcomed James Blue and Misty Frazier as voting members and Senator Merv Riepe and Director Matthew Wallen as non-voting ex-officio members. The third annual retreat was held in October, and included a national data expert to engage in a conversation about data in Nebraska. The Commission additionally contributed legislative testimony or letters to legislative bills and Legislative Committee hearings. Detailed information about activities and meeting minutes are available on the website, www.childrens.nebraska.gov.

The Commission regularly undertakes work to improve its internal and external efficiency and maintain a diverse membership with key systems representatives. As a collaborative body, the Commission regularly reviews current child welfare and juvenile justice initiatives to identify

the most efficient actions and role for the Commission. To continually improve functioning and ensure that the Commission is not duplicating work, a process has been established to communicate and coordinate with leaders of other oversight and stakeholder bodies including the Governor's Commission for the Protection of Children and the Supreme Court's Commission on Children in the Courts. The Commission is dedicated to promoting and enhancing efficiency in its functions and increase cost savings for taxpayers.

In addition to the Commission's activities, some assigned tasks are completed through groups created by statute or in the Commission's Strategic Plan. The Commission votes to appoint members of the statutory Committees to ensure that each has a balanced membership representing all three branches of government, system stakeholders, community representatives, and families and youth whose lives have been impacted by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. This report contains information and recommendations from the Commission's various groups, beginning with its statutory committees and ending with the Workgroups and Task Force created by the Commission to support its Strategic Plan.

For more information, including the Commission's membership listing and group work plans, please view the Appendix and the Commission's website at <http://www.childrens.nebraska.gov>.

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Statutory Charge

The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee was created pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513](#) to make recommendations to DHHS and the Commission regarding the Bridge to Independence program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance.

Background

Nebraska thrives when young adults are able to reach their educational and career goals to enter the workforce and raise families here. When youth cannot safely remain home due to abuse or neglect, or other safety concerns and enter child welfare out-of-home placements, they need supports to transition to adulthood. The Bridge to Independence (B2i) Program was created to support young adults exiting the child welfare system without permanency to reach their goals.

Young adults are eligible for the B2i Program if the young adult is between the ages of 19 and 21 years old, and aged out of foster care in an out of home placement to independent living. To remain in the program, the youth must be working towards a productive adulthood in one of these ways: completing a high school diploma or attaining a GED, taking classes at least part time at a college or vocational education program, work at least 80 hours a month, be engaged in an activity designed to allow the young adult to address barriers to workforce

participation, or be medically incapable of the above activities. Young adults must also meet with the B2i Program worker, called the Independence Coordinator on a monthly basis.

Current B2i Advisory Committee Priorities

1. Monitor ongoing implementation of the current B2i Program; and
2. Outcome evaluation of the current B2i Program;
3. Expanding to or improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults

Key Recommendations and Action Steps of the 2017 B2i Advisory Committee Report

The B2i Advisory Committee will:

1. Partner with the Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services (DHHS-CFS) to ensure that services are coordinated and not duplicated for youth with developmental disability needs, youth with mental health needs, and youth who are parenting.
2. Partner with DHHS-CFS to closely examine and make recommendations related to Title IV-E penetration rates and practices to support fully accessing federal funding.
3. Support the work of DHHS-CFS and the Foster Care Review Office in completing an outcome evaluation of the Bridge to Independence Program, and partner in making program changes and recommendation based on the results of the evaluation.
4. Support the improvement of outcomes for similar at-risk groups of young adults, including through establishing a path to enrollment in the current DHHS-facilitated Bridge to Independence Program for youth involved in Nebraska’s juvenile justice system who are in a court ordered out-of-home placement as they age out of probation on their 19th birthday, and the court has made a finding that out-of-home placement is necessary because returning to the home would be “contrary to the welfare of the child.”

More Information

The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee is co-chaired by Commission Vice Chairperson Jeanne Brandner and Mary Jo Pankoke. The group has met four times in 2017, with significant work occurring between meetings in workgroups and stakeholder support.

The full report of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee can be reviewed at [\[link\]](#).

FOSTER CARE REIMBURSEMENT RATE COMMITTEE

Statutory Charge

The Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee was created by the Nebraska State Legislature to support foster parents and children by examining and making recommendations related to foster care reimbursement rates, the statewide standardized level of care assessment,

and adoption assistance payments. The Committee is charged with creating recommendations on July 1, 2016, and every four years after.

Background

The FCRRRC first began working on foster care reimbursement rates following its creation in 2012. The FCRRRC and the work charged to it are products of [LR37 \(2011\)](#), a legislative study created to review, investigate, and assess the effects of child welfare reform. LR37 found that foster parent compensation in Nebraska was inconsistent and lacking in a statewide standard. These findings indicated a need to create a basic statewide rate for compensation.

As a result of the LR37 study, the FCRRRC was established by [LB820](#) in 2012. At the time, Nebraska foster care rates were among the lowest in the nation. LB820 (2012) required the creation of base rates for foster parents and for the parents to be paid directly, instead of through child placing service agencies. The FCRRRC did significant work to ensure that the new base rates and direct payment to foster parents were adequate to recruit and retain quality foster homes and would not have an adverse impact on the agencies that provide foster parent support.

The FCRRRC was continued in 2013 by [LB530](#), which required the FCRRRC to create a standard statewide assessment tool and foster parent reimbursement rates. The FCRRRC released its [legislative report](#) containing the rate recommendations, Nebraska Caregiver Responsibilities Assessment Tool, and other recommendations to monitor the implementation process in May of 2014. This report and recommendations were the result of countless hours of work from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC), child placing agencies, and many other organizations and individuals. Since that time, the FCRRRC has continued to monitor implementation of the rates and tool, accept additional assignments from DHHS and the Commission, and work to create its legislatively required report.

Current FCRRRC Priorities

1. Foster Care Reimbursement Rates: Continue to monitor and review the rate as provided in statute to ensure recruitment and retention of quality foster homes.
2. Nebraska Caregiver Responsibilities Tool: Continue a Continuous Quality Improvement process around the Nebraska Caregiver and Responsibilities Tool.
3. Treatment Foster Care: Research and make recommendations related to a rate structure that includes expectations regarding treatment components adequate to serve youth in out-of-home care for whom placement is problematic.

Key Recommendations of the 2016 Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Report

1. The current Foster Parent Base Rates, Pre-Assessment rates, and Agency Support Rates are adequate and should continue to be implemented.

2. The FCRRRC, the Nebraska Children’s Commission, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services (DHHS-CFS), Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC), the Administrative Office of Probation (AOP), and child placing agencies should continue to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the base rates, level of foster parenting rates, and Child Placement Agency Rates.
3. The Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility Tool should continue to be implemented for all youth placed out of home by DHHS-CFS and NFC.
4. DHHS-CFS and partners should continue to implement a training and quality assurance plan to educate workers on the changes and requirements in the tool.

Strategic Action Steps

1. Utilize workgroups to create recommendations and improvements.
2. Continue to receive information and updates from agencies to identify changes and recommendations

More Information

The Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee is co-chaired by Commission Chairperson David Newell and Peg Harriott. The group has met once in 2017 with significant work occurring in workgroups and stakeholder initiatives.

The 2016 Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Report is available here: <https://goo.gl/5g6LzM>

JUVENILE SERVICES COMMITTEE

Statutory Charge

Examine the Office of Juvenile Services and the Juvenile Services Division of the Office of Probation Administration. Such committee shall review the role and effectiveness of out-of-home placements utilized in the juvenile justice system, including the youth rehabilitation and treatment centers, and make recommendations to the commission on the juvenile justice continuum of care, including what populations should be served in out-of-home placements and what treatment services should be provided at the centers in order to appropriately serve those populations. Such committee shall also review how mental and behavioral health services are provided to juveniles in residential placements and the need for such services throughout Nebraska and make recommendations to the commission relating to those systems of care in the juvenile justice system. [[Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4203\(2\)\(b\)](#)]

Background

Juvenile justice policies and programs are essential to the well-being of youth and safety of communities. When youth who are in or at risk of entering the juvenile justice system can remain safely in their communities, they can reach their full potential. Nebraska’s economy and workforce rely on healthy youth living, working, and raising families safely in their

communities. Nebraska has made juvenile justice a priority with stakeholders working together to identify innovative solutions to the challenges facing youth who are involved with or at risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system.

Collaboration with the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice

In order to enhance collaboration, coordinate initiatives, and increase the impact and efficacy of juvenile justice reform in Nebraska, the Juvenile Services Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission and the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice have begun collaborating in the form of joint meetings, joint reporting, and inclusive workgroups. This collaboration will allow the most coordinated response possible for juvenile justice reform, while allowing each body to meet its statutory obligations in the most efficient way possible.

These groups will work together in 2018 towards juvenile justice reform and improved outcomes for Nebraska's youth and families. Both groups remain willing to serve as a resource to the Legislature, Governor, Judicial Branch, and state agencies for any juvenile justice related issue or initiative.

Juvenile Services Committee Mission

Design a comprehensive, accountable, culturally competent, continuum of care in the juvenile justice system that meets the needs of families and youth while maintaining public safety.

Juvenile Services Committee Goal

To work collaboratively with the executive, legislative, judicial, and county branches of government, the Nebraska Children's Commission, and other key stakeholders to establish and support the development of the ideal juvenile justice system that will prevent children and youth from entering or becoming more deeply involved in the juvenile justice system.

Current Juvenile Services Committee Priorities

1. **Legislative Reform:** Promote legislative reform in line with best practices in juvenile justice.
2. **Placement and Needs Mapping:** Identify the placement needs of the juvenile justice population and the resources available to these youth throughout the state.
3. **Evaluation and Assessment:** Apply the highest standards of evaluation, assessment, and research in the social sciences to the understanding of existing needs of youth in Nebraska.
4. **Out-of-Home Placements and Transitions:** Review and make recommendations related to best practices in the juvenile justice out-of-home continuum of care, including transition supports.
5. **Cross-System Coordination:** Identify areas of potential cross-system collaboration, and promote best practices to coordinate services and program.

Key Recommendations of the 2017 Annual Report

Legislative Reform

1. Current juvenile justice legislation must be monitored to identify gaps that prevent adoption of best practices.
2. Best practices in sealing and expunging should be a priority in legislative reform to allow youth to thrive and reach their full potential.
3. Legislation should encourage diversion program. Counties are encouraged to adopt the best practice of offering diversion prior to filing in juvenile court.
4. Support the Administrative Office of Probation in their implementation of the graduated response grid.

Placement and Needs Mapping

5. The Placement and Needs Mapping Workgroup (PNMW) will continue identifying the needs of the juvenile justice population and the resources available throughout the state.
6. The PNMW will create a needs assessment for decision makers to use in planning out-of-home services and placements location capacity. This will support a juvenile justice system of care where youth with out-of-home placement needs are served in their communities at the least restrictive level of care necessary.

Evaluation and Assessment

7. A Unified and shared database should be created for agencies that assess, serve, and treat youth across the state. This database could allow for enhanced case management, as well as prediction of needs across the state and individualized data outcomes for research.
8. Current emphasis on programs and actions that prevent initial contact with the juvenile justice system should continue.

Out of Home Placements and Transitions

9. The YRTCs should remain open and serve their current high risk population.
10. The Legislature should fund the YRTCs at a level to meet the staffing requirements of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).
11. The YRTCs are currently the only juvenile justice no eject, no reject facility in the State. This can result in youth who should be served elsewhere being admitted to the YRTC, including youth with severe mental health, developmental disability, or substance abuse needs. The Out of Home Placement and Transitions Workgroup (chaired By Vicky Thompson-Smith) will continue working towards systemic solutions to this important issue.

Cross System Coordination

12. State funded entities are encouraged to fund in a manner that boosts the use of the Collective Impact Model and encourages braided funding.

13. The State of Nebraska, in partnership with state and private entities that fund juvenile justice initiatives, should explore the use of blended funding. This collaborative process should identify necessary changes in legislation, policy, and funding requirements to support blended funding.
14. Encourage the use of telehealth to increase access to services across the state.
15. Review the data related to service gaps and outcomes gathered as part of the System of Care to assess its ability to address the treatment and non-treatment needs of youth involved in the Nebraska Juvenile Justice system.

More Information

This Committee is co-chaired by Commission member Kim Hawekotte and Nicole Brundo. It has met five times in 2017, with significant work occurring in workgroups between meetings.

For more information and recommendations of the Juvenile Services Committee, please visit [\[LINK\]](#)

PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATIONS COMMITTEE

Statutory Charge

The Psychotropic Medications Committee was created by statute to examine state policy regarding policy and procedures for prescribing and administering psychotropic medications to youth who are wards of the state and make recommendations for changes in policies and procedures.

Background

The Psychotropic Medications Committee works to support the health and well-being of youth in foster care by examining the provision of psychotropic medication and making recommendations that ensure that agencies utilize best practices in psychotropic medication review and oversight procedures.

Current Priorities

1. Supporting the Department of Health and Human Services in tracking the usage of psychotropic medications prescribed for children in the care of the state.
2. Promoting best practices and interventions for safe and low risk usage for children who are at high risk or have high or complex needs.
3. Training foster parents, case workers, and caregivers on issues related to psychotropic medications.
4. Identifying and promoting best practices for informed consent, supporting DHHS in implementing procedures to assure that consenters have proper information to give informed consent.

Strategic Action Steps

1. Pilot implementation of the informed consent form. The group has created the pilot project to ensure that the decision makers at DHHS-CFS who consent for medications for foster youth are able to make the best decision possible with relevant, timely, and accurate information.
2. Serve as a forum for information and strategies for training related to psychotropic medications. The group will work to support the Department of Health and Human Services in ensuring that foster parents are trained and empowered to advocate for foster children related to mental and behavioral health and the safe use of psychotropic medications.

More Information

The Psychotropic Medications Committee is chaired by Commission member Dr. Paula Wells and Dr. Gregg Wright. The group has met three times in 2017, with significant work occurring in workgroups and stakeholder initiatives in between meeting times.

To review the most recent update of the Psychotropic Medications Committee, please visit: <https://goo.gl/qoTHfQ>.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT COMMITTEE

Statutory Charge

The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act Committee shall monitor and make recommendations regarding the implementation in Nebraska of the federal [Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183](#), as such act existed on January 1, 2017, and the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act, [Neb. Rev. Stat. [§43-4701](#) to [§43-4715](#)].

Background

Nebraska thrives when its families, youth, and children have healthy and productive lives and reach their full potential. Youth in child welfare out-of-home placements face extra challenges in accessing these protective factors due to past abuse and neglect, the trauma of removal from their homes, and moving around due to placement changes. All children who are state wards in out-of-home placements have incredible potential, and the Strengthening Families Act empowers families, foster parents, caseworkers, guardians ad litem and other stakeholders to support children's well-being by allowing children and youth to experience normalcy.

Normalcy is about supporting youth to reach their full potential by accessing protective factors like extracurricular activities, employment, and healthy supportive connections. Foster parents are empowered by the SFA to use the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard, which allows the freedom to make decisions as a caregiver that support normalcy, such as consenting to sleepovers, enrollment in sports activities, and participation in extracurricular activities. This

connection to normalcy allows youth to build the foundation of protective factors needed to reach their full potential.

Priorities

1. Continue to monitor the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Act
2. Promote normalcy as the foundation to: prevent trafficking; address disparate impacts on minorities; and support the successful transition to adulthood
3. Coordinate implementation with other policy making bodies

Key Recommendations from the 2017 Annual Report

Monitor Implementation of the Strengthening Families Act

1. The Strengthening Families Act Committee will continue to serve as a forum to support the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts.
2. Provide the Legislature and the Children's Commission with an in depth review and analysis of the Normalcy Plan reports as required by [LB225 \(2017\)](#).
3. The Strengthening Families Act Committee continues to recommend a comprehensive Bill of Rights that includes the rights identified in the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Report from 2016, available here: <https://goo.gl/86CKRv>.
4. Youth need to be regularly notified of their rights in a developmentally and age appropriate manner.

Preventing Trafficking

5. Normalcy activities should go beyond extracurricular activities, and should include acquiring life skills, such as driving, jobs skills and experience, and social activities such as prom and homecoming dances.
6. Design or designate a centralized procedure to receive reports and coordinate the response to trafficked minors.

Address Disparate Impact on Minorities

7. Normalcy activities and family contact should be used to attain the goals set forth in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and foster connections for youth with tribal affiliation to their families and tribes as much as possible.
8. Support the work of the communities and stakeholders to reduce the disparate impact of the child welfare system on minorities and prevent disproportionate amounts of minority families from entering the child welfare system or out of home placements.

Successful Transition to Adulthood

9. All stakeholders should continue to focus on legal and emotional permanency for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system, regardless of the court approved permanency goal.

10. The transition plan must include planning for life skill attainment, and an assessment to determine gaps in skills.
11. Life skill attainment should be tracked as youth move from placement to placement. This tracking can be achieved through a paper form but would ideally be through a web-based application or other electronic/digital means.
12. Each family team meeting includes a discussion of an independent living skill, and creates a goal to attain an additional independent living skill.

Coordinate Implementation with Other Policy Making Bodies

13. The Strengthening Families Act Committee is dedicated to ensuring that implementation is youth informed, and encourages this through this engagement with youth members.
14. The APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) Subcommittee and the Trafficking Subcommittee will collaborate to identify and recommend best practices for the role of the Strengthening Families Act Advocate/Advisor, pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1311.03\(2\)](#). The groups will work with DHHS-CFS, youth, families, and community partners to make recommendations.
15. The Committee has created the Court Implementation Subcommittee to collaborate with the Courts in supporting Normalcy and achieving improved outcomes for youth.
16. The Committee will support the Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services as it works to create a Youth Bill of Rights, and to support the Court Improvement Program as it updates its “Know Your Rights” guide for youth.
17. The Grievance Subcommittee has created a comprehensive guide to best practices available here: <https://goo.gl/FrQg71>. The group will reconvene to review data and update its recommendations. The Subcommittee works with providers and state agencies to ensure that youth in foster care can enforce their rights.

More Information

The Strengthening Families Act Committee is chaired by Commission Member Vernon Davis and Sarah Helvey. The group has met four times in 2017, with significant work occurring in workgroups and stakeholder initiatives in between meeting times.

To review the most recent report of the Strengthening Families Act Committee, please visit: [LINK].

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Strong families and children are the backbone of a healthy and thriving state and economy. Nebraska is dedicated to becoming the best place to live, work, and raise a family, and this requires strong child welfare and juvenile justice systems that support families, children, and youth to reach their full potential.

The Commission updated its strategic plan in 2017 to provide an overarching framework for child welfare and juvenile justice reform efforts. The Commission understands that if system improvement is to be effective and lasting, it must happen at all levels, including system, program, and practice levels. The Commission revisited its priorities from the previous Strategic Plan to reaffirm the goals and create a strategic action plan to support the system in achieving these goals.

Workforce

A strong workforce supports the well-being of children, families, and communities.

Prevention

Communities are empowered to prevent child welfare and juvenile justice involvement through strong partnerships and collaboration.

Data

Data systems are integrated and coordinated to support information exchange and transparency.

System of Care

Public and private agencies, families, and communities partner to create a statewide seamless system of care supporting well-being.

Legal Parties

The juvenile court system, including the Juvenile code, attorneys, and court processes, improves the well-being, safety and permanency of children.

WORKFORCE WORKGROUP

Strategic Plan Goal

A strong workforce supports the well-being of children, families, and communities.

Background

The child welfare workforce supports children and families to build the foundation of well-being necessary to reach their full potential. A strong connection with a caseworker provides children with a stable relationship to help them face the challenges of system involvement, attain permanency, and ultimately successfully transition to adulthood. When system involved youth reach their full potential, the community and economy benefits as the youth goes on to enter the workforce and have their own stable family.

A strong workforce has been the focus of the Commission since its creation in 2012. The Legislature affirmed the importance of the workforce by requiring the Commission to analyze and make recommendations related to the child welfare workforce.

Objectives

1. Recognize caseworkers and caseworker supervisors as the foundation of the child welfare system. If a strong foundation of caseworkers and supervisors is built, the state will have a strong child welfare system, regardless of structure.
2. System stakeholders support caseworkers, starting with understanding the role of the caseworker and treating caseworkers with the respect they deserve.
3. Caseworker is seen as a complex and difficult vocation that deeply impacts children and families, not an entry-level position.
4. Caseworkers are not required to make unnecessary or duplicate data entries to report data.
5. Support and listen to the Department of Health and Human Services and lead agency Nebraska Families Collaborative as they build a strong workforce.

Priorities

1. Focus conversations with key stakeholders;
2. Identify and engage with stakeholders from the private sector;
3. Advocate for a stable workforce; and
4. Statutory compliance with tasks.

Highlighted Strategic Action Steps

1. The Workforce Workgroup and the Nebraska Children's Commission continues to recommend that the legislature undertake a comprehensive evaluation regarding child welfare caseworker professionals and include the issues of caseworker salaries, incentives, and caseload limits.
2. Continue to work on the statutory charges as per Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4203(7)
3. Continue to advocate for incentives for stakeholders
4. Continue to advocate for evidence based training requirements for persons who work in the area of child welfare and their supervisors.

More Information

The Workforce Workgroup is co-chaired by Commission member Deb Van Dyke-Ries and Jude Dean. For more information, please visit <https://goo.gl/8U7rEG>.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF CHILD WELL-BEING

Strategic Plan Goal

Communities are empowered to prevent child welfare and juvenile justice system involvement through strong partnerships and collaboration.

Background

When children and families are served in their communities, they create a rich network of resources and relationships to bolster their well-being throughout their lifespans. This network allows for people to reach their full potential in their communities, which in turn allows communities to thrive with strong families and a workforce that supports a strong economy. Families can face the stressors of life and raising children that all families experience with minimal or no intervention from the state. Taking advantage of opportunities to collaborate and leverage existing resources allows communities to innovate in ways that drastically improve the social and economic health of the community.

Current Prevention Priorities

1. Identify and support communities with strong collaborative efforts.
2. Listen to communities to understand their successes and barriers.
3. Identify administrative and policy changes to address barriers.
4. Focus on opportunities for growth.

Objectives

1. Prevention is a priority and is adequately funded to improve child well-being
2. Community collaboratives act as strong networks supporting children and families in Nebraska.
3. Communities understand and champion the protective factors needed for successful families.
4. Families are supported by a strong partnership between communities and the Department of Health and Human Services.
5. A strong neutral backbone entity is adequately funded to ensure the success of collaboration within the communities.
6. Families are supported by a strong partnership between communities and the Department of Health and Human Services.
7. The State supports prevention with integrated systems and blended funding.
8. Entities adopt shared language and definitions for a prevention system and the three levels of prevention strategies.

Highlighted Strategic Action Steps

1. Resume community listening sessions in 2018;
2. Communicate with new community collaboratives;
3. Connect community collaboratives with each other; and
4. Continue to listen and learn from communities.

More Information

The Community Ownership of Child Well-Being Workgroup is chaired by Commission member Teresa Anderson and Mary Jo Pankoke. For more information about the group, please visit: [LINK].

SYSTEM OF CARE

Strategic Plan Goal

Public and private agencies, families, and communities partner to create a seamless system of care supporting well-being.

Background

Complex issues are best solved by collaboration between public and private agencies. The seamless system of care is the responsibility of the public and private agencies working together to build the well-being of children and families. Together, stakeholders support all people to reach their potential, and in the process, strengthen education, the workforce, and the economy of the entire state. Different levels of partnership are necessary for a seamless system of care. The state works on a higher level to coordinate supports around families, just like communities bring together resources to prevent system involvement.

Objectives

1. Prevention is a priority and is adequately funded to improve child well-being.
2. Child welfare and juvenile justice are front and center in the System of Care Plan.
3. Agencies communicate across systems.
4. Barriers to cross-system communication are identified and eliminated.
5. Alternative Response is expanded to serve a wider range of families across the state.
6. Nebraska has a statewide shared commitment to trauma informed response.
7. Operations are aligned with trauma informed care statewide.
8. Decisions are made with a team-based approach.

Strategic Action Steps

1. Actively engage in Division of Behavioral Health System of Care implementation to ensure that child welfare and juvenile justice are front and center, and enhance collaboration and communication between systems and agencies.
2. Support the expansion of Alternative Response and address the restrictive eligibility requirements of the current AR program to increase the number of families eligible for this program.
3. Recommend that the Legislature add the Director of the Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Human Services, as an ex-officio member of the Nebraska Children's Commission.

4. Evaluate the feasibility of utilizing performance-based contracting for specific child welfare services, including the feasibility of additional contractual requirements for service providers requiring services to all children without an option to deny service.
5. Collaborate with the Division of Behavioral Health on a shared plan for a system of care that includes goal driven and outcome based services in child welfare.
6. Advocate for legislation that invests in prevention.

More Information

The Commission has chosen to put the System of Care Workgroup on hiatus status to support and not duplicate the work of the Department of Health and Human Services System of Care Initiative. Past Chairperson Beth Baxter co-chairs the Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Behavioral Health’s Nebraska System of Care Leadership Board and facilitates the coordination efforts between the groups.

LEGAL PARTIES TASKFORCE

Strategic Plan Goal

The juvenile court system, including the Juvenile Code, attorneys, and court processes, improves the well-being of children and families.

Background

Juvenile Courts in Nebraska are rehabilitative in nature, and are focused on supporting the well-being of children and families, whether they are child welfare or juvenile justice involved. Children and families need competent and zealous legal counsel throughout the legal process to ensure they have access to the supports they need to reach their full potential.

Current Legal Parties Task Force Priorities

1. Improve professionalism in Juvenile Court
2. Improve provision of legal services and representation to parties
3. Review legislation for potential impact on juvenile court and practice

Objectives

1. The practice of juvenile law is a professional and desirable career path.
2. The roles and responsibilities of legal parties are efficient and clearly communicated.
3. The Juvenile Code, court jurisdiction and legal processes are structured to promote improved wellbeing for court-involved children and families.
4. Juvenile court is rehabilitative for families and children.
5. Court-involvement is beneficial and an agent for lasting change for children and families.
6. Juvenile court attorneys are professional and work to attain key competencies.

Strategic Action Steps

1. Research and evaluate the state Juvenile Code, court jurisdiction, and legal processes, including thorough examination of practice in other states.
2. Encourage professionalism and attainment of competencies in the practice of juvenile law by:
 - a. Increasing the amount of juvenile practice specific trainings available to legal parties and other system stakeholders.
 - b. Encouraging the Supreme Court of Nebraska to require dedicated Continuing Legal Education (CLE) hours for all attorneys who practice in juvenile court, and
 - c. Support initiatives in Nebraska law schools for students with interest in pursuing careers in juvenile practice.
3. Continue to monitor the implementation of [LB180 \(2017\)](#), which provides for Bridge Orders in juvenile court.
4. Work to improve the professionalism in juvenile court and the provision of legal services to parties.
5. Provide analysis of proposed legislation that may affect juvenile courts or practice.
6. Support the work being done by the Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts related to juvenile court guardianships.
7. Examine statutes to determine best practices in protective supervision for child welfare involved youth that does not require the youth to be a ward of the state while allowing parents to access supports and services. Identify and recommend legislative changes to support best practices.
8. Examine exception hearings, and make recommendations for legislative changes to support best practices.

More Information

This group is chaired by Commission member Kim Hawekotte, and has met three times in 2017, with significant work occurring in between meetings. For more information, please visit [\[LINK\]](#).

NEBRASKA CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

SUBGROUP WORK PLANS

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The B2i Advisory Committee and B2i Evaluation Workgroup are active and have created the work plans below. The B2i Advisory Committee recently convened the Finance and Policy Workgroup to meet in November of 2017, and additionally has two groups on hiatus awaiting the need to resume work, the Juvenile Justice Extension Taskforce and the IV-E Penetration Rate Workgroup.

Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee	
Goals	
Goal #1	Monitor ongoing implementation of the current B2i Program and make recommendations
Goal #2	Outcome Evaluation of Current B2i Program
Goal #3	Expanding to and improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Receive information to create recommendations
Strategy #2	Coordinate with the external outcome evaluation of the B2i Program
Strategy #3	Support expansion of the B2i Program to juvenile justice youth.
Products	
Product #1	Annual report and recommendations
Product #2	Collaboration
Product #3	Outcome evaluation support

Bridge to Independence Committee – B2i Evaluation Workgroup	
Goals	
Goal #1	Coordinating/providing feedback in external evaluation
Goal #2	Review and guide data that exists from organizations related to the Bridget to Independence Program; and
Goal #3	Identify desired outcomes for the Bridge to Independence Program.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Strategies same as goals.
Products	
Product #1	Input and coordination on the external evaluation
Product #2	Support the B2i Advisory Committee by guiding data and information
Product #3	Identified outcomes for the B2i Program.

FOSTER CARE REIMBURSEMENT RATE COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee and its Level of Responsibility Workgroup have created work plans. The Treatment Foster Care Workgroup is active, but in the process of collaborating with agencies to determine next steps and establish a work plan. The Foster Parent Survey Task Force, and the Foster Care Rate Subcommittee are on hiatus awaiting the need to resume work.

Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee Information	
Goals	
Goal #1	Promote legislative reform in line with best practices in juvenile justice.
Goal #2	Identify the needs of the juvenile justice population and the resources available to these youth throughout the state.
Goal #3	Apply the highest standards of evaluation, assessment, and research in the social science to the understanding of existing needs of youth in Nebraska.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Utilize workgroups to create recommendations
Strategy #2	Receive information from agencies to identify changes and recommendations.
Products	
Product #1	Recommendations related to Treatment Foster Care
Product #2	Report to the Legislature in 2020.

Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee Information – Level of Responsibility Workgroup	
Goals	
Goal #1	Identify and make any necessary revisions, changes, or modifications to the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility Tool.
Goal #2	Identify and make recommendations related to training and education to promote the effective use of the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility (NCR) Tool.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Respond to issues related to the NCR as identified by the Department of Health and Human Services, Lead Agency Nebraska Families Collaborative, child placing agencies, and foster parents.
Products	
Product #1	Recommendations, including revisions to the NCR Tool.

JUVENILE SERVICES COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Juvenile Services Committee, Legislation Workgroup, Placement and Needs Mapping Workgroup have created work plans below. The Out of Home Placement and Transitions Workgroup has met twice and is in the process of identifying its work plan. The Courts and Legal System Workgroup, the Evaluation of Programs and Assessment of Youth Workgroup, and the Service Coordination Workgroup are on hiatus awaiting the need for further work.

Juvenile Services Information	
Goals	
Goal #1	Promote legislative reform in line with best practices in juvenile justice.
Goal #2	Identify the needs of the juvenile justice population and the resources available to these youth throughout the state.
Goal #3	Apply the highest standards of evaluation, assessment, and research in the social science to the understanding of existing needs of youth in Nebraska.
Goal #4	Review and make recommendations related to best practices in the juvenile justice out-of-home continuum of care, including transition supports.
Goal #5	Identify and promote best practices to prevent racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Continue to collaborate with existing juvenile justice structure as much as possible, and support the work of the workgroups.
Products	
Product #1	Increased collaboration and recommendations to improve the juvenile justice system in Nebraska and support the agencies.

Juvenile Services Committee – Legislative Workgroup	
Goals	
Goal #1	Monitor and identify gaps in legislation related to juvenile justice.
Goal #2	Promote legislative reform in line with best practices related to juvenile justice.
Goal #3	Promote compliance with the four core requirements of the OJJDP.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Track bills and report on content.
Strategy #2	Inform stakeholders of data and research.
Strategy #3	Provide data and policy research to assist senators.
Strategy #4	Provide input and resources to support legislation.
Strategy #5	Coordinate legislative testimony.

Appendix A

Products	
Product #1	Bill Tracker
Product #2	Legislative Testimony
Product #3	Data and policy reports and briefs

Juvenile Services Committee – Placement and Needs Mapping Workgroup	
Goals	
Goal #1	Continue identifying the needs of the juvenile justice population and the resources available throughout the state.
Goal #2	Understand the current capacity of the juvenile justice system’s out of home placement continuum care, including the locations and levels of care across the state.
Goal #3	Understand the path that youth take through the juvenile justice system out-of-home placement continuum of care, including placement changes and changes in level of care.
Goal #4	Create a needs assessment for decision makers to use in planning out-of-home services and placements. This needs assessment will support a juvenile justice system of care where youth with out-of-home placement needs are served in their communities at the least restrictive level of care to meet their needs.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Refresh data previously accessed to update project.
Strategy #2	Establish a validation process for data used for the tool.
Strategy #3	Communicate the types and locations of out-of-home placements, services, and levels of care are available in the state.
Products	
Product #1	A needs assessment/tool for decision makers to use in planning out-of-home services and placements. (Timeline Uncertain at This Point)

PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATIONS COMMITTEE

The Psychotropic Medications Committee has established its work plan for 2018. The Informed Consent Task Force finished its task of creating an informed consent document, and additional groups may be formed to oversee the Informed Consent Form Pilot Implementation.

Psychotropic Medications Committee

Appendix A

Goals	
Goal #1	Supporting DHHS in tracking the usage of psychotropic medications prescribed for children in the care of the state.
Goal #2	Promoting best practices and interventions for safe and low risk usage of psychotropic medications for children who are at high risk and have high or complex needs.
Goal #3	Training foster parents, case workers, and caregivers on issues relate to psychotropic medications
Goal #4	Identifying and promoting best practices for informed consent, supporting DHHS in implementing procedures to ensure that consenters has proper information to give informed consent.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Pilot implementation of informed consent form
Strategy #2	Assess data resources needed
Strategy #3	Serve as a forum for information and strategies for training related to psychotropic medications
Products	
Product #1	Updates to the Commission
Product #2	Informed consent document
Product #3	Informed consent pilot implementation
Product #4	Collaborative training project

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT COMMITTEE

This group recently created the Court Implementation Subcommittee that has had one meeting in November of 2017 and is working to define its work plan. Three additional groups, Normalcy Subcommittee, the Grievance Subcommittee, and the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee are on hiatus until the need to become active arises. The work plans for the Strengthening Families Act Committee, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement Subcommittee, and the Trafficking Subcommittee are included below.

Strengthening Families Act Committee	
Goals	
Goal #1	Continue to monitor the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Act.
Goal #2	Promote Normalcy as the foundation to: Preventing trafficking; Reducing disparate impacts on minorities; and Successful transition to adulthood
Goal #3	Coordinate implementation with other policy making bodies
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Support the work of the subcommittees
Strategy #2	Collaborate with key stakeholders

Appendix A

Strategy #3	Identify and communicate best practices
Products	
Product #1	Collaborative Structure
Product #2	Best Practices Recommendations
Product #3	Legislative and Policy Recommendations
Product #4	Annual Report
Product #5	Communication and Education with Stakeholders and Policy Makers

Strengthening Families Act Committee – APPLA Subcommittee	
Goals	
Goal #1	Include more youth voice in determining and achieving permanency goals.
Goal #2	Take a team approach to determining and achieving permanency goals.
Goal #3	Promote best practices for implementation of the APPLA provisions in the State and Federal Strengthening Families Act.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Identify best practices for permanency staffing meeting.
Strategy #2	Bring more youth voice and participation into the group.
Products	
Product #1	Best practices guide for permanency staffing meeting.
Product #2	Improved recommendations informed by youth voice.

Strengthening Families Act Committee – Trafficking Subcommittee	
Goals	
Goal #1	Strengthen the system to minimize the trafficking victimization of system-involved youth.
Goal #2	Monitor and make recommendations to ensure that the implementation of the Federal and State Strengthening Families Act supports the prevention of trafficking.
Goal #3	Create and support collaborative approaches to trafficking.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Engage and collaborate with key stakeholders
Strategy #2	Gather information and data related to implementation of State and Federal Strengthening Families Act.
Products	

Appendix A

Product #1	Recommendations for best practices and collaboration in implementation of State and Federal SFA and prevention of Trafficking.
Product #5	Communication and Education with Stakeholders and Policy Makers

NEBRASKA CHILDREN’S COMMISSION STRATEGIC PLAN GROUPS

The Commission has identified five goal areas in its strategic plan. There are three groups actively working on goals, while the Data, Technology, Accountability and Reporting Workgroup and the System of Care Workgroup are currently on hiatus awaiting the need to resume work. For more information on these goals, please reference the Commissions 2017-2018 Strategic Plan.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF CHILD WELL-BEING

This group was established to support the Commission’s Strategic Plan goal that “Communities are empowered to prevent child welfare and juvenile justice system involvement through strong partnerships and collaboration.”

Nebraska Children’s Commission – Community Ownership of Child Well-being	
Goals	
Goal #1	Identify and support communities with strong collaborative efforts.
Goal #2	Listen to communities to understand their successes and barriers.
Goal #3	Identify administrative and policy changes to address barriers.
Goal #4	Focus on opportunities for growth.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Resume community listening sessions in 2018.
Strategy #2	Communicate with new community collaboratives.
Strategy #3	Connect community collaboratives with each other.
Strategy #4	Continue to listen and learn from communities.
Products	
Product #1	Recommendations to be included in the annual report.
Product #2	Education and awareness about community collaboratives.

LEGAL PARTIES TASK FORCE

This group was established to support the Commission’s Strategic Plan goal that “The juvenile court system, including the Juvenile Code, attorneys, and court processes, improves the well-being of children and families.”

Nebraska Children’s Commission – Legal Parties Task Force

Appendix A

Goals	
Goal #1	Improve professionalism in Juvenile Court.
Goal #2	Improve provision of legal services and representation to parties.
Goal #3	Review legislation for potential impact on juvenile court and practices.
Goal #4	Focus on opportunities for growth.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Examine findings and recommendations of Supreme Court Commission work on Guardianships.
Strategy #2	Make recommendations related to protective supervision of child welfare involved youth.
Strategy #3	Make recommendations related to best practices in exception hearings.
Strategy #4	Thoroughly examine juvenile court jurisdiction statutes.
Products	
Product #1	Recommendations for best practice and statutory changes.
Product #2	Legislative testimony.

WORKFORCE WORKGROUP

This group was created to support the Commission’s Strategic Plan goal that “A strong workforce supports the well-being of children, families, and communities.”

Nebraska Children’s Commission – Legal Parties Task Force	
Goals	
Goal #1	Improve professionalism in Juvenile Court.
Goal #2	Improve provision of legal services and representation to parties.
Goal #3	Review legislation for potential impact on juvenile court and practices.
Goal #4	Focus on opportunities for growth.
Strategies	
Strategy #1	Examine findings and recommendations of Supreme Court Commission work on Guardianships.
Strategy #2	Make recommendations related to protective supervision of child welfare involved youth.
Strategy #3	Make recommendations related to best practices in exception hearings.
Strategy #4	Thoroughly examine juvenile court jurisdiction statutes.
Products	
Product #1	Recommendations for best practice and statutory changes.
Product #2	Legislative testimony.

Nebraska Children's Commission Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Vacant	Voting	,	Biological Parent Currently Or Previously Involved In The Child Welfare System or juvenile justice system
Teresa Anderson	Voting	Health Director , Central District Health Department	Community Representative - Central Service Area
Beth Baxter (Past Chair)	Voting	Administrator , Behavioral Health Region 3	Administrator of a Behavior Health Region
Jim Blue	Voting	President and CEO , CEDARS Youth Services	Child Welfare Service Agency
Holly Brandt	Voting	Executive Director , CAPstone Child Advocacy Center	Community Representative - Western Service Area
Jennifer Chrystal-Clark	Voting	Attorney , Douglas County	Prosecuting Attorney Who Practices in Juvenile Court
Vernon Davis	Voting	Young Adult Previously in Foster Care , Young Adult Previously in Foster Care	Young Adult previously in Foster Care
Misty Frazier	Voting	Director of the Dakota Tiwahe Service Unit , Santee Sioux Nation of Nebraska	Representative of a federally recognized Indian tribe residing within the State of Nebraska
Kim Hawekotte	Voting	Executive Director , Foster Care Review Office	Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office
Felicia Nelsen	Voting	Executive Director , Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association	Community Representative - Southeast Service Area
David Newell (Chair)	Voting	President & CEO , Nebraska Families Collaborative	Community Representative - Eastern Service Area (Lead Agency)
Deb O'Brien	Voting	FCRB Member ,	Member of a Local Foster Care Review Board

Nebraska Children's Commission Membership

Lisa Story	Voting	Community Member/Foster Parent, Community Representative of the Northern Service Area	Community Representative - Northern Service Area
Susan Thomas	Voting	CASA Volunteer, Nebraska CASA Association	Court Appointed Special Advocate Volunteer
Janine Uchino	Voting	Attorney, Law Office of Janine Uchino	Guardian Ad Litem
Kelli Wacker	Voting	Director, Northeast Nebraska Child Advocacy Center	Director of a Child Advocacy Center
Paula Wells	Voting	Foster Parent,	Foster Parent
Bill Williams	Voting	Chief Operating Officer, COMPASS	Representative Of A Child Advocacy Organization
Sen. Kate Bolz	Ex-Officio	Senator, Nebraska Legislative Council	Designee of the Chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the Legislature
Michele Borg	Ex-Officio	Education of Systems-Involved Students (ESIS) Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Education	Designee of the Commissioner of the Department of Education
Jeanne Brandner (Vice Chair)	Ex-Officio	Deputy Administrator of the Division of Juvenile Services, Administrative Office of Probation	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks	Ex-Officio	Senator, Nebraska Legislative Council	Designee of the Chairperson of the Judiciary Committee of the Legislature
Courtney Phillips	Ex-Officio	Chief Executive Officer, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services	CEO of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Judge Linda Porter	Ex-Officio	Judge, Lancaster County Juvenile Court	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Sen. Merv Riepe	Ex-Officio	Senator, Nebraska Legislative Council	Designee of the Chairperson of the HHS Committee of the Legislature

Nebraska Children’s Commission Membership

Julie Rogers	Ex-Officio	Inspector General , Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare	Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare
Deb VanDyke-Ries	Ex-Officio	Director , Nebraska Court Improvement Project	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Matthew Wallen	Ex-Officio	Director , DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services	Director of Children and Family Services division of DHHS

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