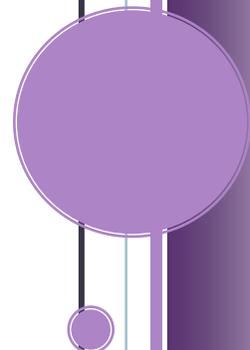


BRIDGE TO
INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY
COMMITTEE 2017
ANNUAL REPORT

Submitted pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513



Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Annual Report

2017

Statutory Charge: Make recommendations regarding the Bridge to Independence Program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4513(1)]

Strategic Goals

Priority 1: Monitor ongoing implementation of the current B2i Program.

Priority 2: Outcome evaluation of the current B2i Program.

Priority 3: Expanding to and improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults.

Contact Information

For more information or to get involved, please visit childrens.nebraska.gov, or email necc.contact@nebraska.gov.

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Nebraska thrives when young adults are able to reach their educational and career goals to enter the workforce and raise families here. When a youth cannot safely remain at home due to abuse, neglect, or other safety concerns and enters 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.

The Bridge to Independence (B2i) 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. This Advisory Committee is chaired by Jeanne Brandner (Administrative Office of Probation) and Mary Jo Pankoke (Nebraska Children and Families Foundation) and has met four times in 2017, exceeding the statutory requirement of two meetings per year. The Advisory Committee has identified three priorities to guide its work. This report will provide strategic action recommendations to promote these three priorities, and a matrix of the information is available at Appendix A.

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

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Bridge to Independence Program is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services (DHHS-CFS) to help young adults exiting child welfare out-of-home placements achieve their goals and reach their full potential. The Program was implemented in October of 2014, and is now in its third year of operation. More in depth data can be reviewed at Appendix B through C of this document.

Young adults are eligible for the B2i Program if they are between the ages of 19 and 21 years old, and aged out of 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.

MONITOR THE ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

The Legislature has charged this group with monitoring the Bridge to Independence Program and the group has made the task its first priority. DHHS-CFS, service providers, youth advocates, system stakeholders and current and former foster youth provide regular feedback and updates. The Advisory Committee strives to serve as a forum for stakeholders to exchange information, provide support, and create innovative solutions to the challenges facing youth aging out of child welfare out-of-home placements.

Coordinate and Eliminate Duplication of Services

The purpose of B2i case management is to connect young adults to the services and supports in their communities. This means that young adults will access multiple community supports at one time to address a wide variety of needs, such a medical and mental health, housing, employment and education services. This requires youth to have case managers who are familiar with the community and needs of the youth. The B2i Advisory Committee, in partnership with DHHS will examine the potential for service duplication and the following specific areas to ensure that youth receive the best possible case management and community resources:

Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities

All young adults deserve to reach their full potential, and young adults with developmental disabilities may need extra support to stay in their homes and communities. Young adults with developmental disability needs who are also transitioning out of foster care may be eligible for services from both DHHS's Division of Children and Family Services and Division of Developmental Disabilities. Some young adults are eligible for both the Bridge to Independence Program and Developmental Disability Home and Community Based Services (HBCS) Waiver, both of which include access to supportive services and case management.

The HBCS Waiver Program has a priority waiting list for young adults transitioning out of out-of-home placements in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The B2i Advisory Committee commends the Division of Developmental Disabilities for recognizing the needs of these youth and helping them reach their full potential.

Young adults with severe disabilities may be unable to obtain education and employment. These young adults are often served in the "barriers to employment or education" eligibility. This category provides services to help young adults become capable of employment and education. If it is not possible for a young adult to remove these barriers due to a developmental disability, the case management provided by the Independence Coordinator may not be helpful to the young adult.

The Committee will explore the services that young adults with developmental disabilities are eligible for when transitioning out of out-of-home placements. These young adults need to

connect to the most beneficial services to help them stay and thrive in their homes and communities.

Young Adults with Mental Health or Behavioral Health Needs

Young Adults in the B2i Program may also have mental or behavioral health needs that require access to community supports and services. DHHS Division of Behavioral Health and the Behavioral Health Regions. The Advisory Committee will explore the services that young adults with mental health need are eligible for when transitioning out of child welfare out-of-home placements, and create recommendations for service provision without duplication of services.

Eligibility Determination and Service Coordination

In Nebraska, young adults come into contact with a number of different eligibility, coordination, and management workers. The young adult will have a public services eligibility worker, Title IV-E eligibility worker, Child and Family Specialist worker, and Independence Coordinator. These individuals are highly knowledgeable about different eligibility requirements and the continuum of services for families and transitioning youth in the communities. As the B2i program has developed, it has become important to begin to monitor the services that young adults are accessing. Youth may be eligible for additional programs, and increased alignment in the eligibility process would allow for upfront coordination of the agency services that youth are accessing.

The Bridge to independence Advisory Committee will explore ways to align the eligibility determination process, including through eligibility determinations for other programs at time of B2i eligibility determination so that informed decisions can be made on how to coordinate services.

Youth who are Parenting (TANF)

Youth who are parenting may be eligible for both B2i stipends for themselves and their children.

In addition to the stipend, the young adult may be receiving or be eligible to receive Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) funding. The TANF program connects the youth to additional services, such as Employment First Services to assist in job and career needs, and Child Support Enforcement services. The young adult's family may additionally be eligible for food stamps or subsidized childcare.

While recognizing that young adults with children need additional support, this amount of funding can create a dramatic cliff effect when a young adult ages out of the program. A mother with one child would receive a stipend of over \$1,400 monthly, a significant amount to lose when aging out of the program. B2i is meant to set up youth to reach their full potential as they grow into adults.

The B2i Advisory Committee will explore the best use of TANF funding and B2i stipends to support Nebraska’s families and reduce the “cliff effect” when a youth leaves the B2i program.

Independence Coordinator

The Independence Coordinator plays a critical role in the B2i Program, and provides significant support and community connections to the young adult. While the IC does not provide any direct services, they are essential to allow the young adult to access the needed services.

The B2i Advisory Committee plans to work in connection with DHHS-CFS to make recommendations about the role of the IC, including by exploring innovative solutions to the challenges posed by this role. Considerations include:

Explore the possibility of a time study to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the IC, and inform a review of IC caseloads to identify best practices in maximum caseloads. This undertaking would be a joint effort.

Explore the role of the IC to ensure that ICs have the ability and knowledge to structure their relationships and interactions with young adults to preserve their safety.

Explore the possibility of further collaboration and alignment through Connected Youth Initiative. The Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) is a program through the Children and Families Foundation that provides case management services through community based coaches/providers for youth and young adults aging out of the child welfare system. The B2i Advisory Committee recognizes that this program has trained case workers who may be able to assume the duties of the Independence Caseworker, and eliminate this duplication of services between these public and private partners.

Title IV-E Funding

The B2i Program is funded with a combination of State and Federal funding. One significant source Federal funding is Title IV-E funding, the largest source of federal funding available for child welfare. Nebraska’s utilization of Title IV-E has been declining as a proportion of its overall child welfare spending, which is in line with national trends. Nebraska faces several challenges in maximizing its use of Title IV-E funds for the B2i Program. The B2i Advisory Committee is dedicated to working with DHHS-CFS to explore legal and policy changes to support utilization of Title IV-E funds.

Title IV-E Income Requirement

The first significant challenge is that the eligibility for Title IV-E funding is tied to an income eligibility standard established in 1996. DHHS-CFS has noted that the income eligibility is the most common reason that a youth is not eligible for Title IV-E funding as it requires a young adult to make under \$411 a month. DHHS-CFS has already engaged in significant work to increase eligibility by changing the Title IV-E State Plan to allow the eligibility determination after the B2i eligible young adult has left the child welfare system, allowing the determination

to be made based on the youth's income and not the youth's parental income. The B2i Advisory Committee notes that due to the very low income eligibility requirements, increased Title IV-E penetration would mean decreased numbers of young adults with employment at the age of nineteen, which is not a desirable outcome. The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to engage with DHHS-CFS and young people to identify legal or policy changes to encourage young adults to access employment without decreasing utilization of Title IV-E funding.

Title IV-E and Youth Residence

Youth in the B2i programs have accessed many exciting opportunities for travel, including study abroad, military stations, and supportive family members who live outside the state of Nebraska. This poses a challenge for the program, as ICs need to meet with the youth face to face for compliance with Title IV-E. This requirement creates a need for ICs to travel potentially long distances on a short notice, and poses a challenge to control the program's travel costs. The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to support and work with the DHHS-CFS to meet the needs of youth living outside the state

DHHS has updated the Committee that they have begun process of exploring the use of courtesy supervision through ICPC or Chafee services. This would allow youth access to a caseworker that is familiar with the youth's community and needs. A Nebraska caseworker is less familiar with the community and cannot be there for the youth in person the same way a local caseworker can.

The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to work with DHHS to explore solutions to the challenges posed by young adults living out of state, including use of Chafee services for courtesy supervision, and will assess if additional advocacy is needed for this population.

Title IV-E and Court Orders

Title IV-E eligibility requires Court Orders with necessary language in a timely manner. The court must open an extended services and support file to determine whether participating in the program is in the young adult best interest. Title IV-E requires the court orders must be within six months after the young adult's nineteenth birthday. The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to monitor this impact of Court Orders on Title IV-E penetration along with DHHS-CFS to make any program, policy, or process improvement.

Complex Eligibility Determination

DHHS-CFS notes that the process to determine if a young adult is eligible for Title IV-E funding is a complex process requirement significant work and documentation, and is working to identify efficiencies in the process. The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to work with DHHS-CFS and stakeholders to increase efficiencies and reduce burdens in the process.

Youth who Leave the B2i Program Early

Some youth do not remain in the B2i Program for the full amount of time they are eligible and leave the program early. At this time, it is unclear why this occurs. In order to understand the experience and needs of young adults, this population should be carefully examined to understand what program changes or improvements can be made to improve outcomes for this group of young adults. The B2i Advisory Committee will partner with DHHS-CFS to examine and support this population.

OUTCOME EVALUATION OF THE BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

DHHS-CFS, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) and the Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) have begun the process of designing an external evaluation for the Bridge to Independence Program. The B2i population participates in evaluations from several different entities, along with data being collected by several entities. The independent evaluation will be carefully designed to ensure that the outcomes for this population are clearly identified and determine correctly which measures will demonstrate whether or not youth are making progress towards these outcomes.

The B2i Advisory Committee created a Workgroup to remain involved and informed of this important evaluation.

The B2i Evaluation Workgroup has identified the following priorities of focus:

1. Coordinating and providing feedback on the external evaluation
2. Review and guide data that exists from other organizations that are provided to the B2i Committee; and
3. Identify the desired outcomes for youth in the B2i Program.

The Workgroup and Advisory Committee will continue to work on this evaluation and look forward to providing the Legislature, Governor, and stakeholders with more information to guide the work of supporting improved outcomes for Nebraska's young adults.

EXPANDING TO AND IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR SIMILAR POPULATIONS

At-Risk Juvenile Justice Population

Nebraska needs solid, healthy, productive young people to raise their families and contribute to the economy in order for the entire state to thrive. Legislation surrounding Bridge to Independence program eligibility should reflect Nebraska's dedication to ensuring that all youth have the opportunity to develop into healthy adults. Program eligibility should include juvenile justice involved youth with clear and demonstrated needs for support to prevent adult

involvement with the criminal justice system, homelessness, and increased need for support programs.

The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee has been charged by statute to create recommendations to expand the program or improve outcomes for to similar groups of at risk young adults. Understanding that young people are the future of our state, workforce and economy, The B2i Advisory Committee has taken this charge very seriously. Each Annual report since 2015 has included recommendations to expand the program to at risk youth exiting the juvenile justice after having been in juvenile justice out-of-home placements.

The Bridge to Independence program can provide a comprehensive system of support to youth who have the same needs and challenges of child welfare involved youth, but who did not receive critical intervention until they entered the juvenile justice system. These youth struggled without parental support and a safe home until they were able to build a relationship and access services through juvenile justice parole officers. This essential relationship and connection to services places the youth on the path to a healthy adulthood, but they need continued support to reach their full potential.

The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee continues to recommend the below:

1. Establish a path for enrollment in the current DHHS-facilitated Bridge to Independence program for youth involved in Nebraska's Juvenile justice System utilizing the following two criteria:
 - a. A young person must be in a court ordered out-of-home placement as they age out of probation on their 19th birthday; and
 - b. Prior to aging out, the court must hold a hearing and make a finding that such placement is necessary because returning to the home would be "contrary to the welfare of the child."
2. Continue to seek expertise into the ability of an interagency agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Probation Administration to be established that would ease youth's path into Bridge to Independence and enhance the state's ability to draw down federal Title IV-E funding.

These recommendations have informed pending legislation, LB179 (2017). The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee will continue to support expansion and work the Legislature, Governor's Office, and stakeholders to ensure that all young adults are able to grow and thrive in Nebraska.

Youth who have experienced disrupted or terminated adoptions or guardianships

The B2i Advisory Committee has identified youth who achieved permanency in guardianships or adoptions, but have later experienced the breakdown of the permanency through disruption or termination as an at-risk population that should be served by the B2i Program. The B2i

Advisory Committee will work to refine this recommendation, including understanding the fiscal impact and population of youth.

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE NEXT STEPS

The B2i Advisory Committee will continue meeting in 2018 to continue exploring the areas identified in this report to monitor the B2i Program, support DHHS-CFS, and provide information and recommendations to the Nebraska Children’s Commission, Governor, Legislature, and DHHS.

DRAFT

MATRIX SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES

The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee has developed strategies to promote each of its three priorities:

Priorities

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

This appendix includes the strategies grouped by the corresponding priority number, with an indication of whether legislation is needed for the strategy and which priority the strategy supports.

DRAFT

MONITOR ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRENT BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

The Legislature has charged this group with mentoring the Bridge to Independence Program, and the group has made the task its first priority. DHHS-CFS, service providers, youth advocates, system stakeholders and current and former foster youth provide regular feedback and updates. The Advisory Committee strives to serve as a forum for stakeholders to exchange information, provide support, and create innovative solutions to the challenges facing youth aging out of child welfare out-of-home placements.

MONITOR ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
<p>Coordinate and Eliminate Duplication of Services: The Committee will explore the services that young adults with developmental disabilities are eligible for when transitioning out of out-of-home placements. These young adults need to be connected to the most beneficial services to help them stay and thrive in their homes and communities.</p>	Need for Legislation Under Review	1
<p>Coordinate and Eliminate Duplication of Services: The Advisory Committee will explore the services that young adults with mental health need are eligible for when transitioning out of child welfare out-of-home placements, and create recommendations for service provision without duplication of services.</p>	Need for Legislation Under Review	1
<p>Coordinate and Eliminate Duplication of Services: The Bridge to independence Advisory Committee will explore ways to align the eligibility determination process, including through including eligibility determinations for other programs at time of B2i eligibility determination so that informed decisions can be made on how to coordinate services.</p>	Need for Legislation Under Review	1
<p>Coordinate and Eliminate Duplication of Services: The B2i Advisory Committee, will explore the best use of ADC funding and B2i stipends to support Nebraska’s families and reduce the “cliff effect” when a youth leaves the B2i program.</p>	Need for Legislation Under Review	1
<p>Independence Coordinator: Explore the possibility of a time study to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the IC, and inform a review of IC caseloads to identify best practices</p>	Need for Legislation	1

MONITOR ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy	Legislation	Goal
in maximum caseloads. This undertaking would be a joint effort.	Under Review	
Independence Coordinator: Explore the structure of the IC role to ensure that ICs have the ability and knowledge to structure their relationships and interactions with young adults to preserve their safety.		
Independence Coordinator: Explore the possibility of further collaboration and alignment through Connected Youth Initiative. The Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) is a program through the Children and Families Foundation that provides case management services for youth and young adults aging out of the child welfare system. The B2i Advisory Committee recognizes that this program has trained case workers who may be able to assume the duties of a the Independence Caseworker, and eliminate this duplication of services between these public and private partners.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1
Title IV-E Funding: The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to engage with DHHS-CFS and young people to identify legal or policy changes to encourage young adults to access employment without decreasing utilization of Title IV-E funding.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1
Title IV-E Funding: The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to work with DHHS to explore solutions to the challenges posed by youth living out of state, including use of courtesy supervision through ICPC or Chafee services for courtesy supervision, and will assess if additional advocacy is needed for this population.	Need For Legislation Under Review	1
Title IV-E Funding: The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to monitor the impact of Court Orders on Title IV-E penetration along with DHHS-CFS to make any program or policy improvement.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1
Title IV-E Funding: DHHS-CFS notes that the process to determine if a young adult is eligible for Title IV-E funding is a	Need for Legislation	1

MONITOR ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy	Legislation	Goal
<p>complex process requirement significant work and documentation, and is working to identify efficiencies in the process. The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to work with DHHS-CFS and stakeholders to increase efficiencies and reduce burdens in the process.</p>	<p>Under Review</p>	
<p>Youth Exiting the Program Early: Some youth do not remain in the B2i Program for the full amount of time they are eligible and leave the program early. At this time, it is unclear why this occurs. In order to fully understand the experience and needs of young adults, this population should be carefully examined to understand what program changes or improvements can be made to improve outcomes for this group of young adults. The B2i Advisory Committee will partner with DHHS-CFS to examine and support this population.</p>	<p>Need for Legislation Under Review</p>	<p>1</p>

DRAFT

OUTCOME EVALUATION OF THE B2I PROGRAM

DHHS-CFS, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) and the Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) have begun the process of designing an external evaluation for the Bridge to Independence Program. The B2i population participates in evaluations from several different entities, along with data being collected by several entities. The independent evaluation will be carefully designed to ensure that the outcomes for this population are clearly identified and determine correctly which measures will demonstrate whether or not youth are making progress towards these outcomes.

OUTCOME EVALUATION		
Strategies	Legislation	Goal
The B2i Evaluation Workgroup will focus on coordinating and providing feedback on the external evaluation.	No	1,2
The B2i Evaluation Workgroup will review and guide data that exists from other organizations that are provided to the B2i Committee.	No	1,2
The B2i Evaluation Workgroup will work with stakeholders to identify the desired outcomes for youth in the B2i Program.	No	1,2
The Workgroup and Advisory Committee will continue to work on this evaluation and look forward to providing the Legislature, Governor, and stakeholders with more information to guide the work of supporting improved outcomes for Nebraska's young adults	No	1,2

EXPANDING TO AND IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR SIMILAR GROUPS OF AT RISK ADULTS

Nebraska needs solid, healthy, productive young people to raise their families and contribute to the economy in order for the entire state to thrive. Legislation surrounding Bridge to Independence program eligibility should reflect Nebraska’s dedication to ensuring that all youth have the opportunity to develop into healthy adults. Program eligibility should include juvenile justice involved youth with clear and demonstrated needs for support to prevent adult involvement with the criminal justice system, homelessness, and increased need for support programs.

EXPANDING TO AND IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR SIMILAR POPULATIONS		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
<p>Establish a path for enrollment in the current DHHS-facilitated Bridge to Independence program for youth involved in Nebraska’s Juvenile justice System utilizing the following two criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A young person must be in a court ordered out-of-home placement as they age out of probation on their 19th birthday; and b. Prior to aging out, the court must hold a hearing and make a finding that such placement is necessary because returning to the home would be “contrary to the welfare of the child. 	Yes	3
<p>Continue to seek expertise into the ability of an interagency agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Probation Administration to be established that would ease youth’s path into Bridge to Independence and enhance the state’s ability to draw down federal Title IV-E funding.</p>	Need for Legislation Under Review	3
<p>The B2i Advisory Committee has identified youth who achieved permanency in guardianships or adoptions, but have later experienced the breakdown of the permanency through disruption or termination as an at-risk population that should be served by the B2i Program. The B2i Advisory Committee will work to refine this recommendation, including understanding the fiscal impact and population of youth.</p>	Need for Legislation Under Review	3

Bridge to Independence

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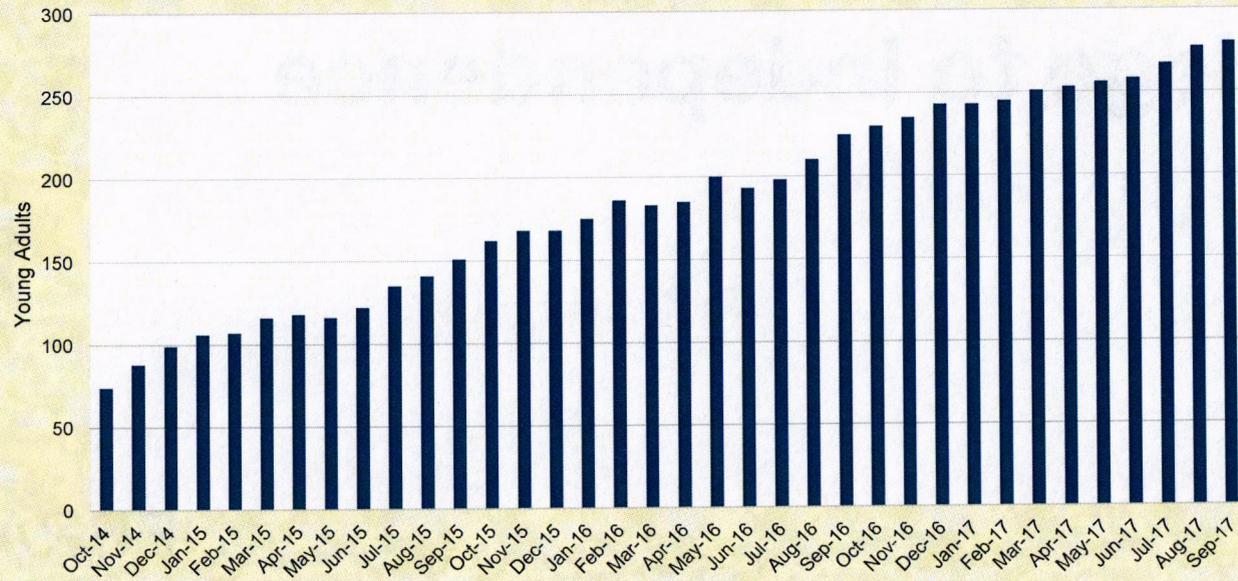
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Young Adults Enrolled in B2I by Month



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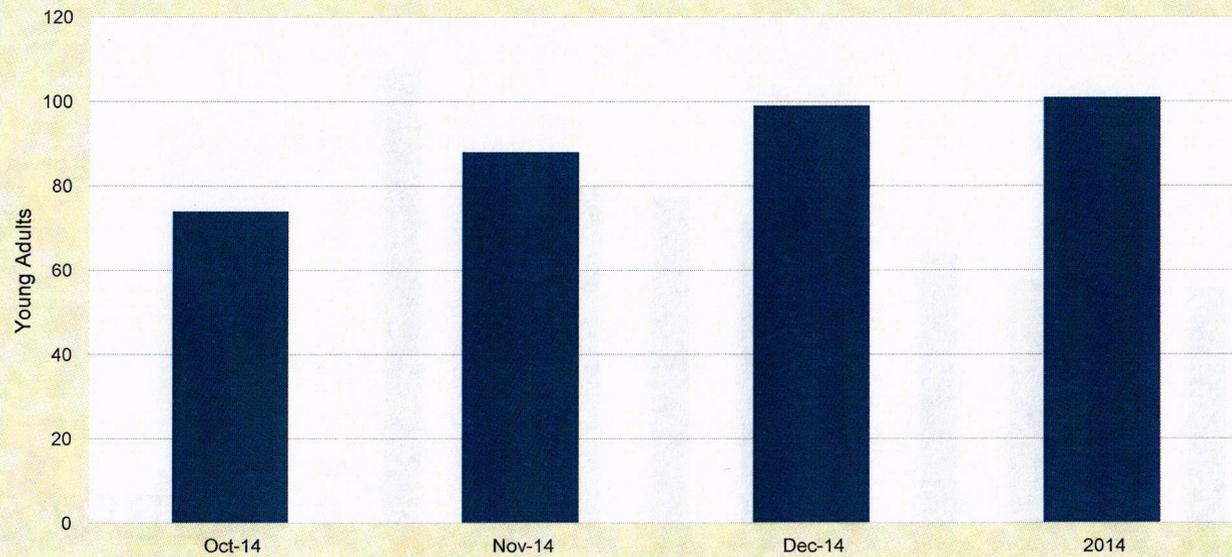
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Young Adults Enrolled by Month and Unique Served During 2014



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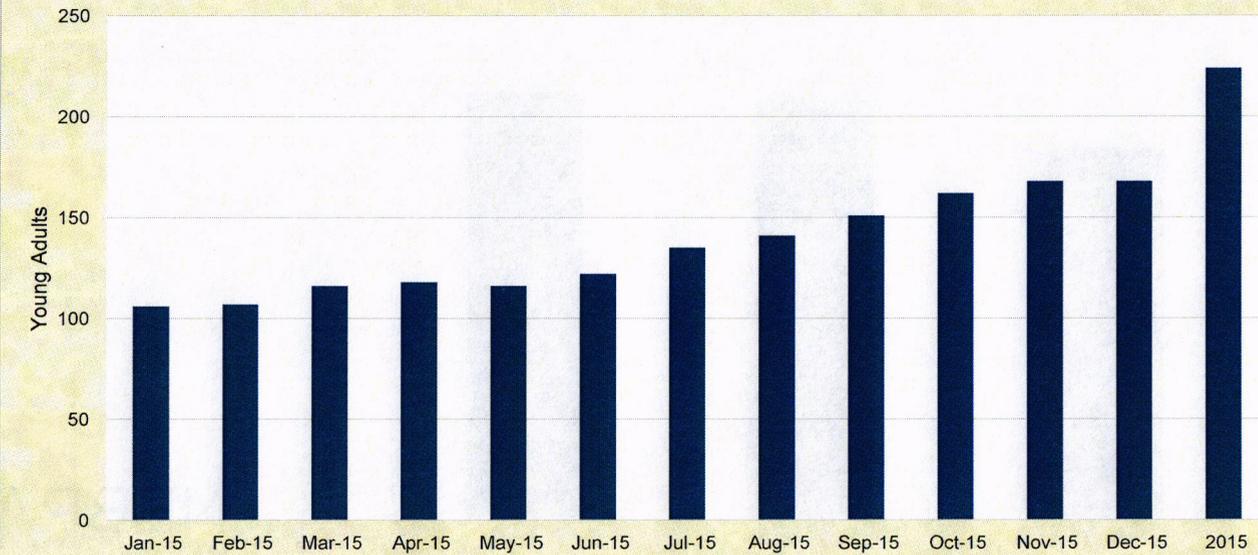
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Young Adults Enrolled by Month and Unique Served During 2015



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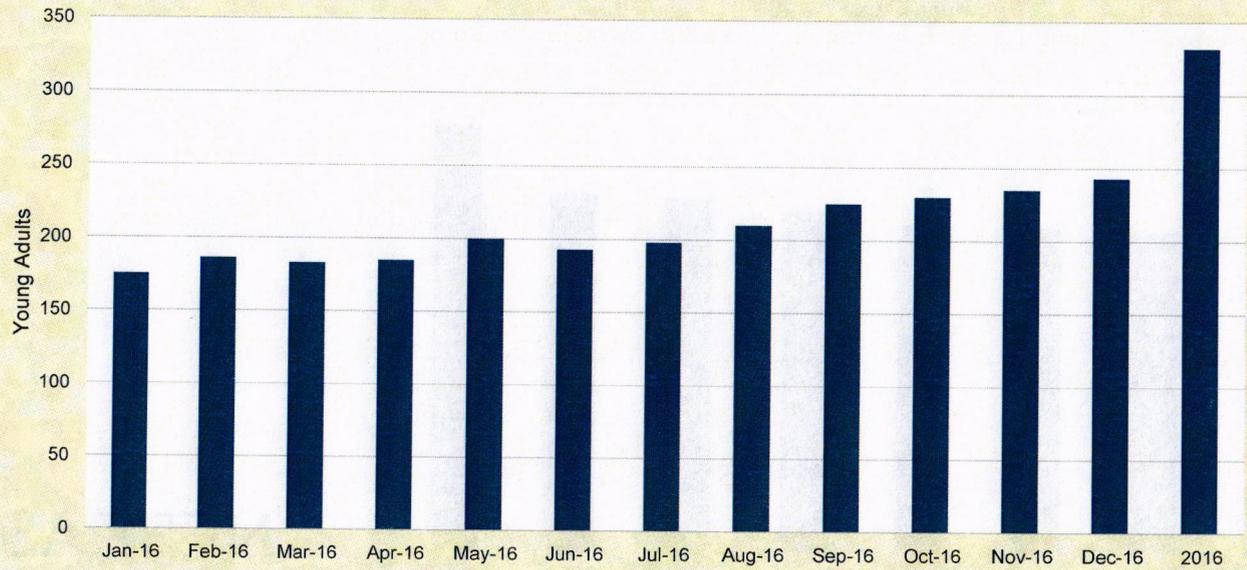
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Young Adults Enrolled by Month and Unique Served During 2016



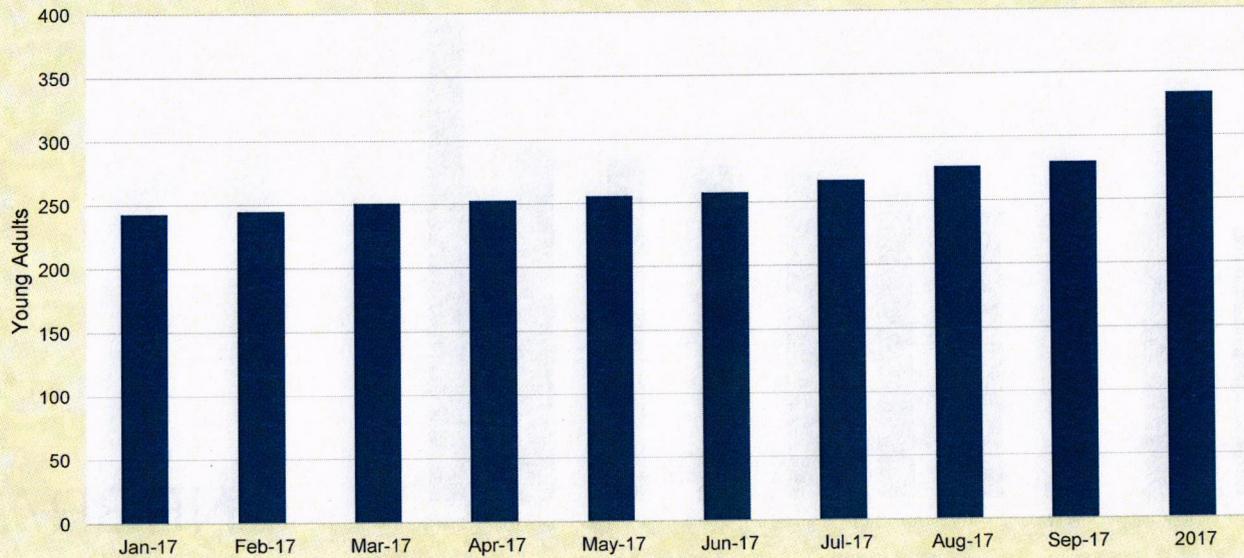
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Young Adults Enrolled by Month and Unique Served During 2017 (through Sept. 20, 2017)

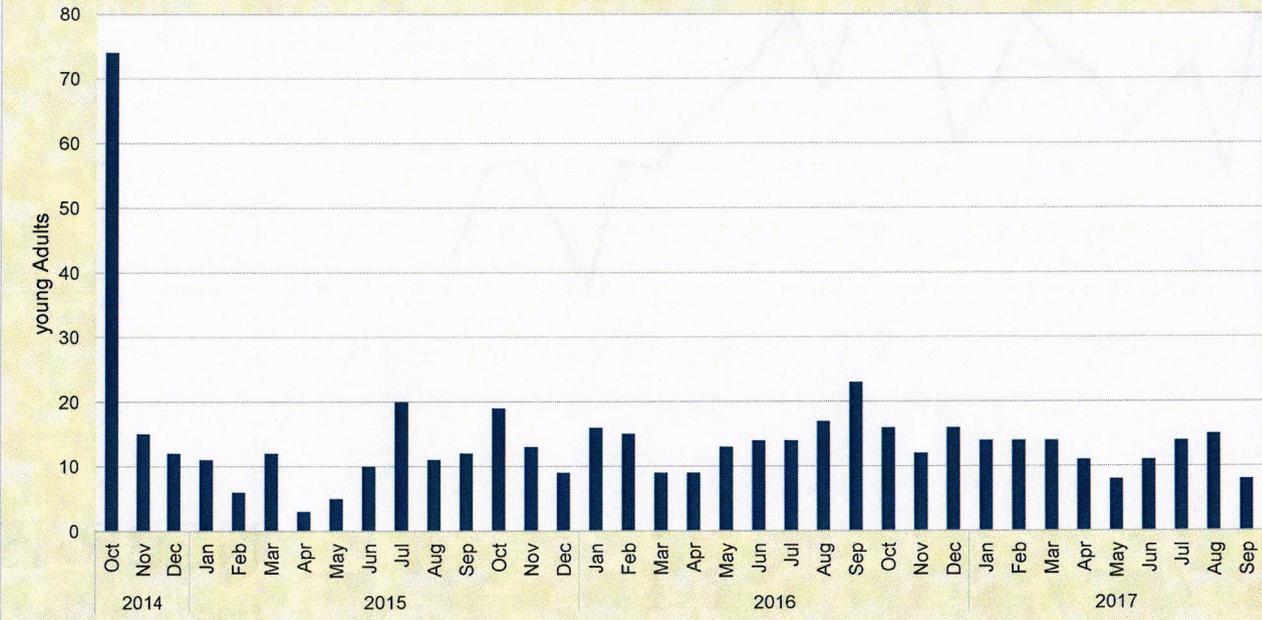


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Young Adults Entering B2I by Month



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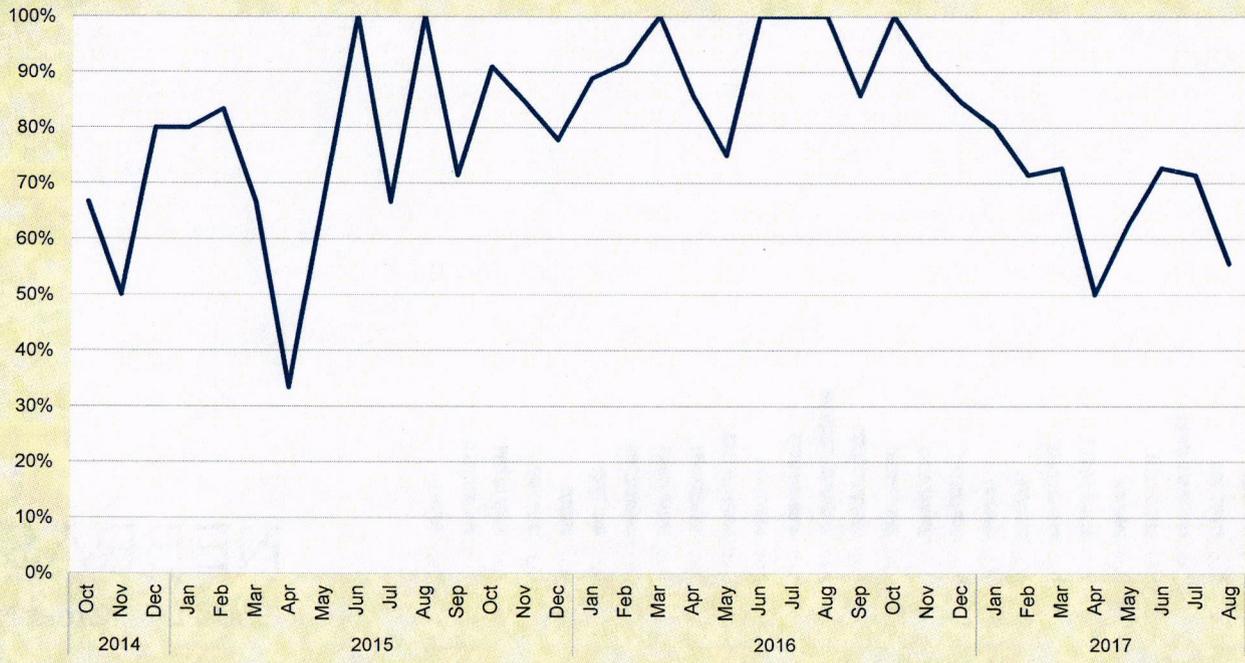
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Percent of State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B2I within 30 Days of Exit



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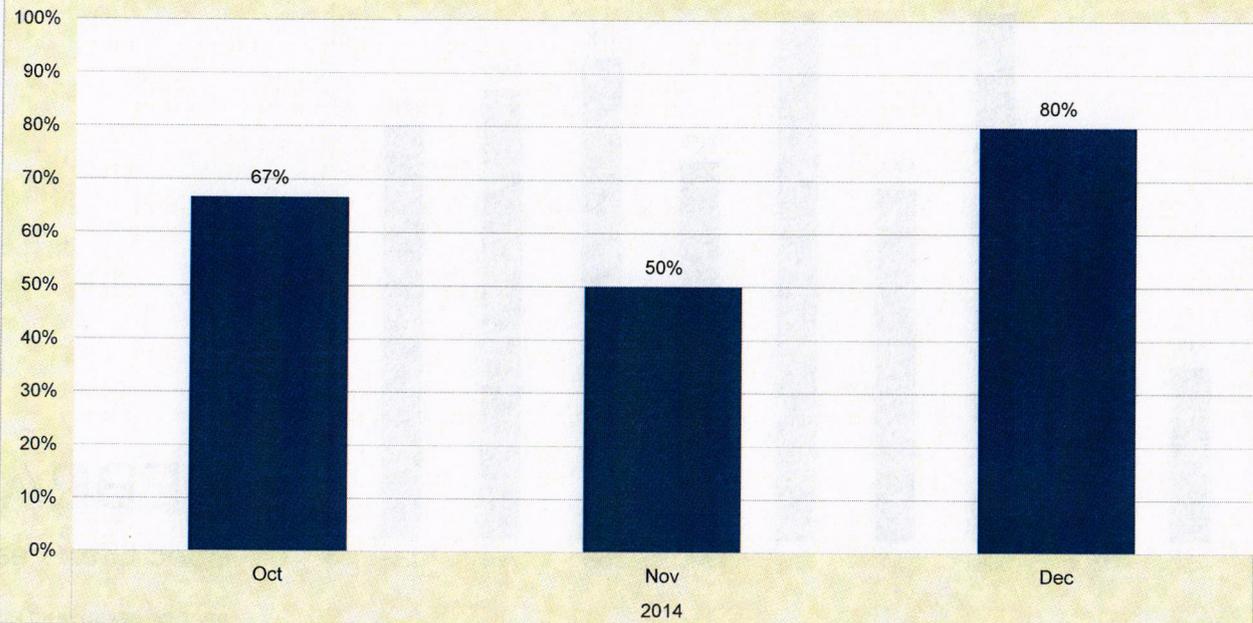
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2014: Percent of State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B21 within 30 Days of Exit



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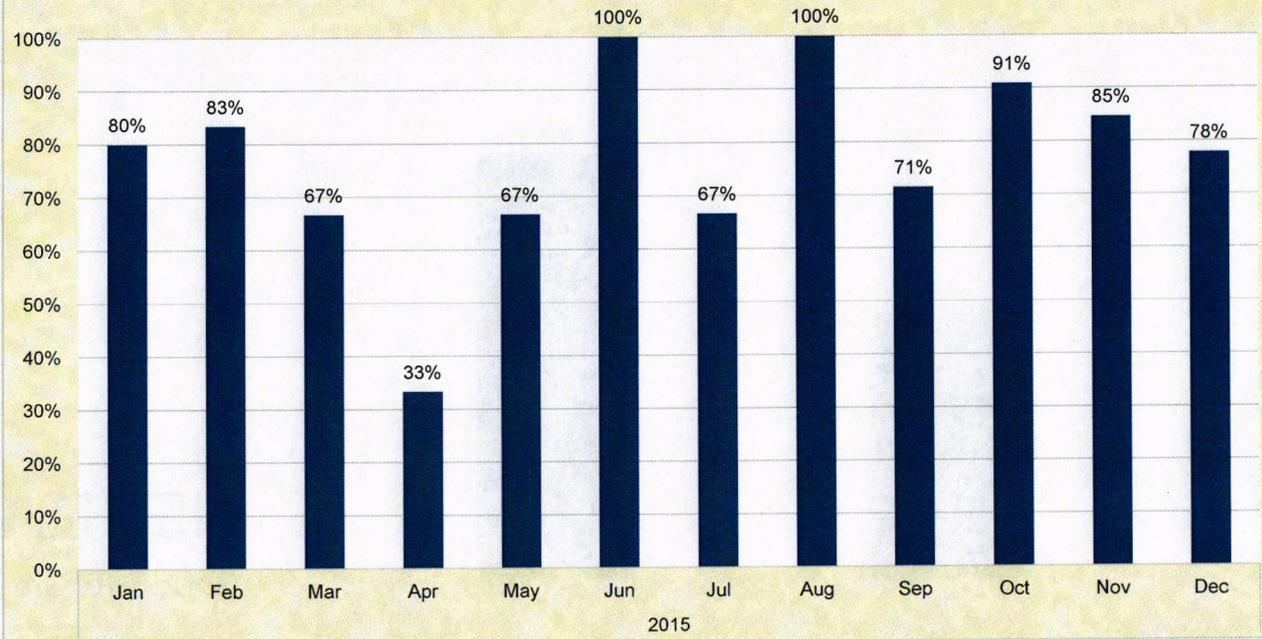
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2015: Percent of State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B2I within 30 Days of Exit



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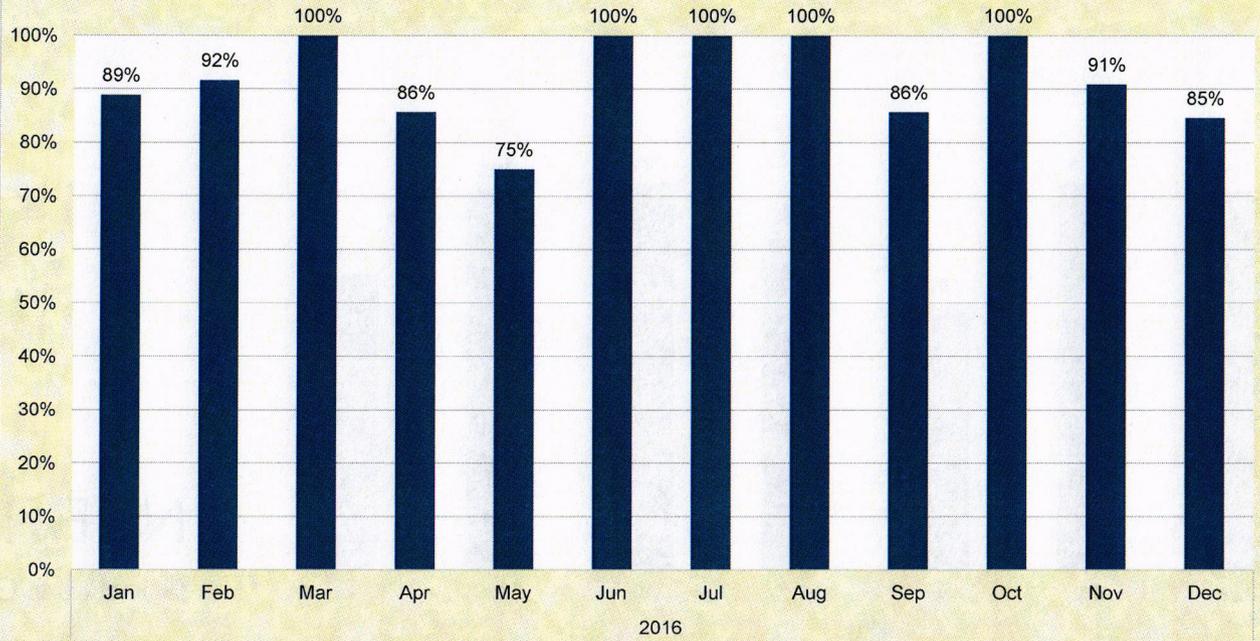
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2016: Percent of State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B21 within 30 Days of Exit



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2017: Percent of State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B2I within 30 Days of Exit



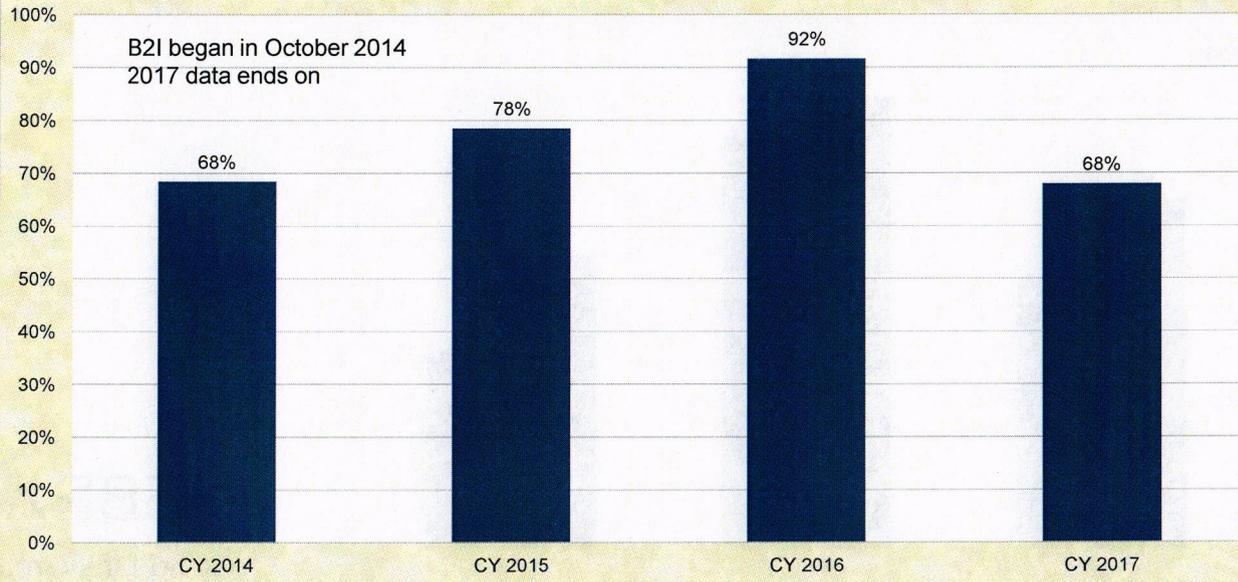
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Percent of State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B2I within 30 Days of Exit

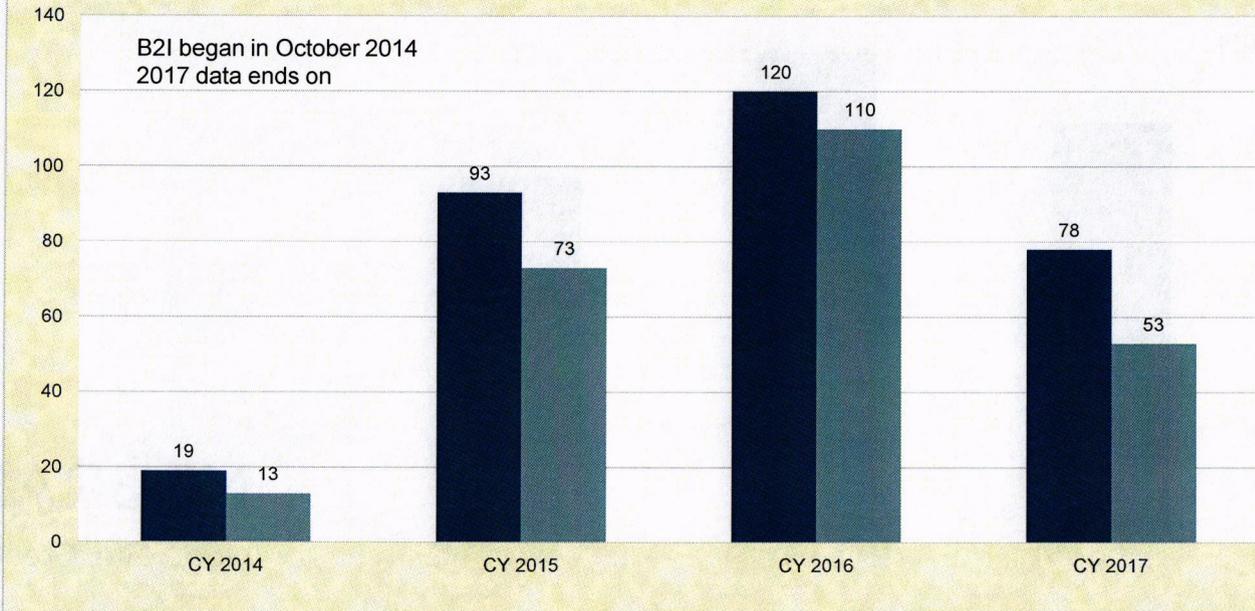


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State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B2I within 30 Days of Exit



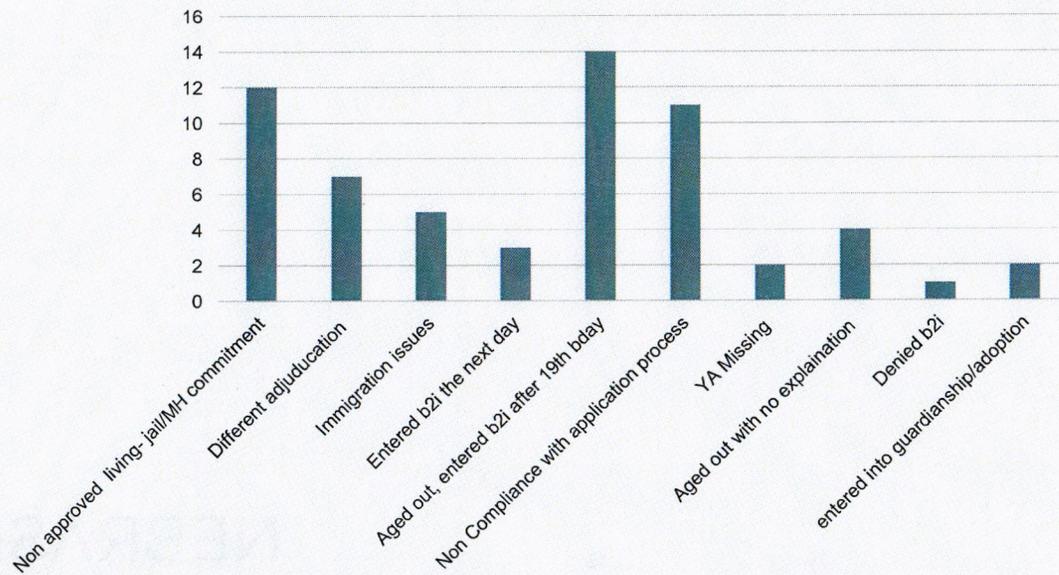
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Reasons Young Adults Did NOT Enter b2i



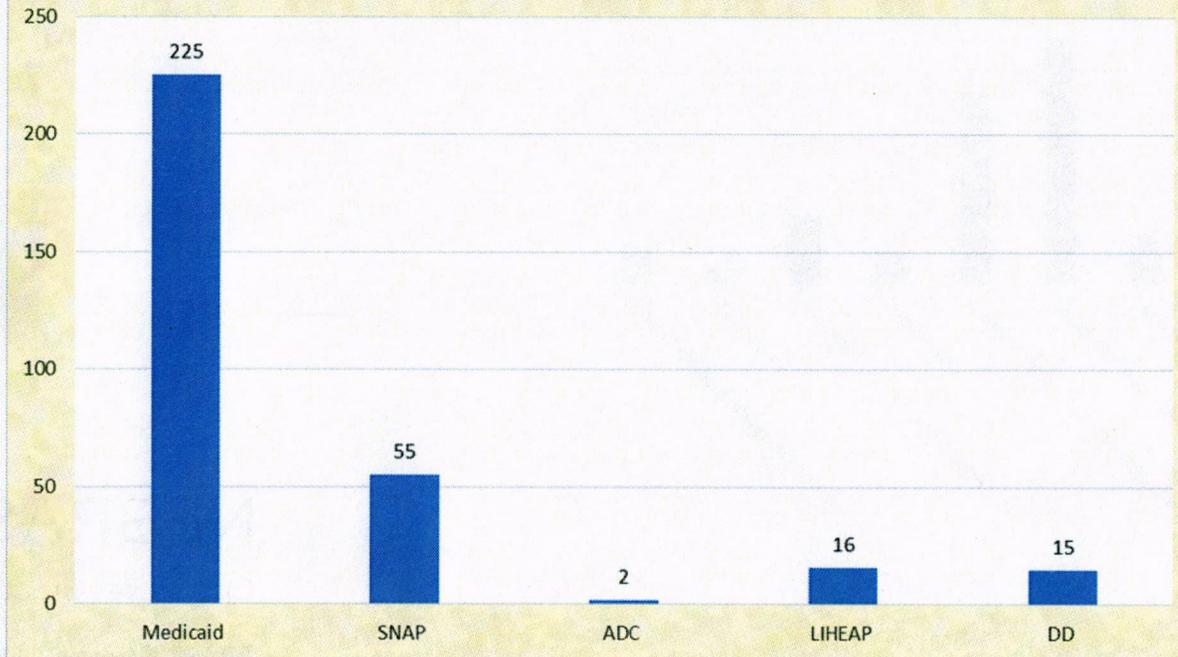
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Other Benefit Program Participation Young Adults Active in B2I as of September 2017

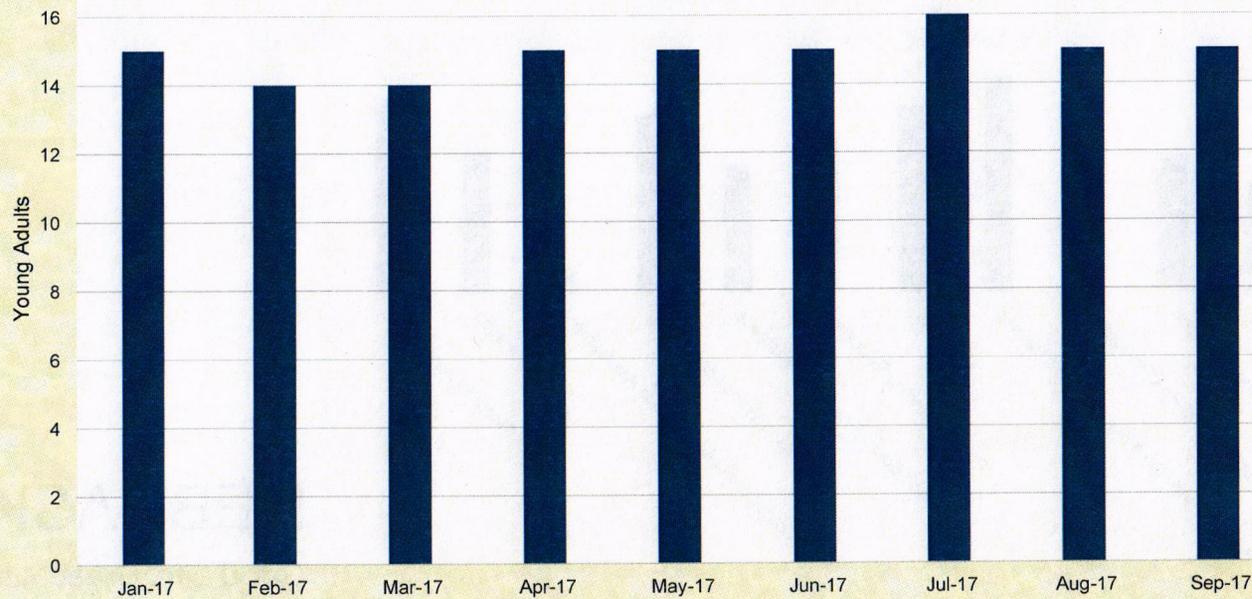


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B2I Young Adults Receiving DD Services



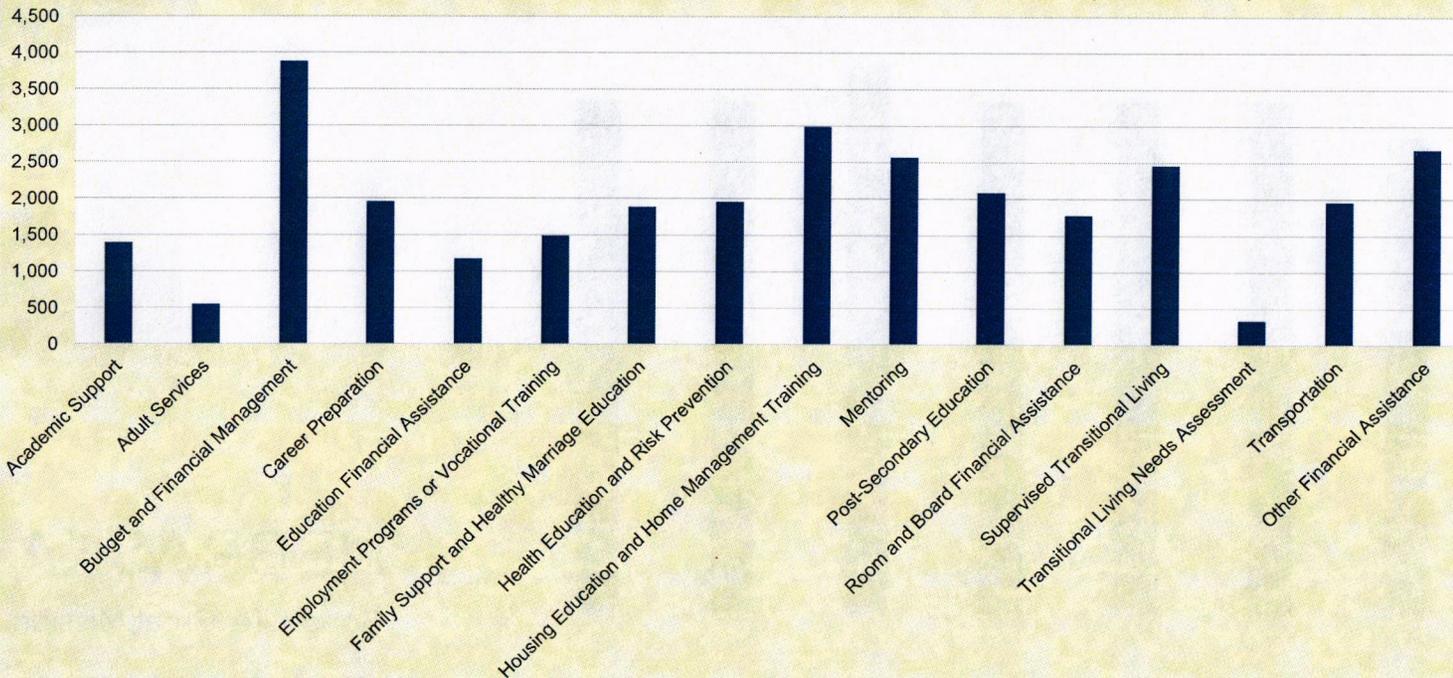
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Independent Living Services Provided to B2I Young Adults (Count of Services Provided Monthly from October 2014 to September 2017)

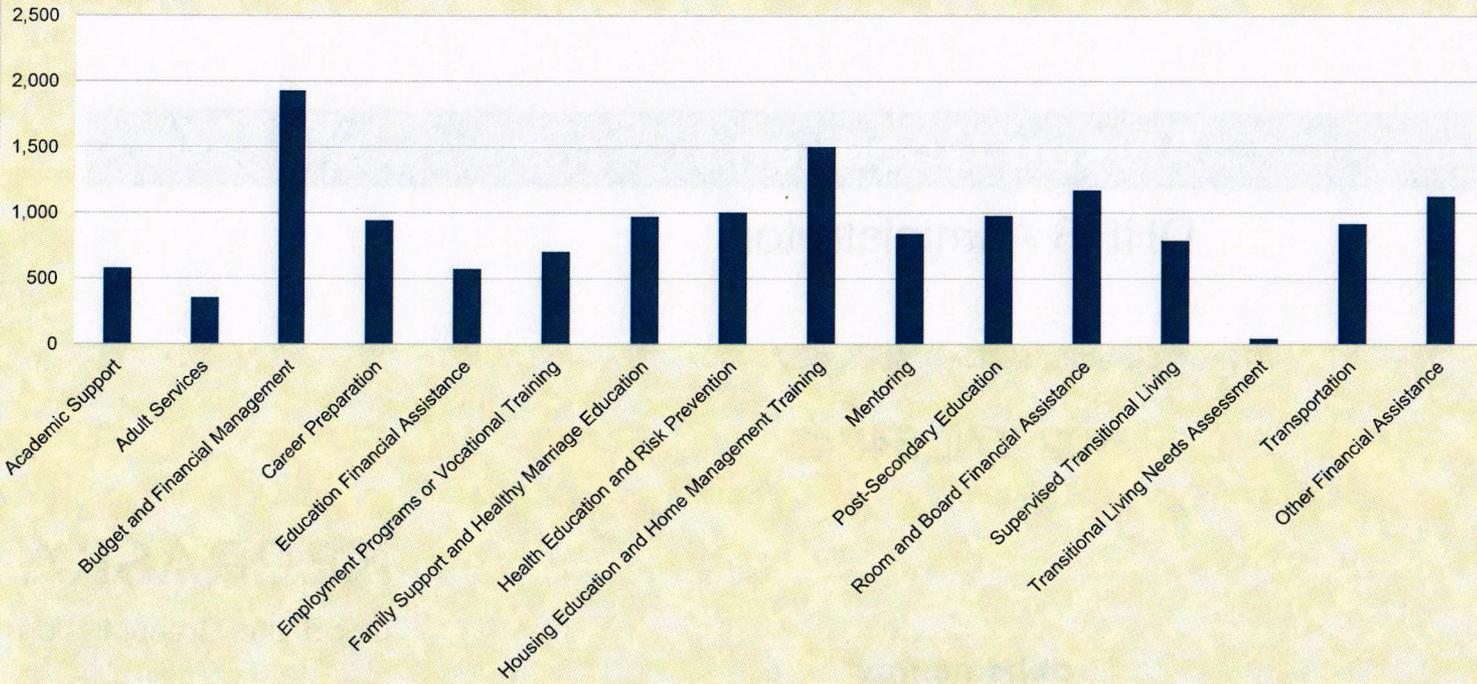


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Independent Living Services Provided to B2I Young Adults in SFY 2017 (Count of Services Provided Monthly)



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The Nebraska
Foster Care Review Office
B2i Case Review Report

July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017



Prepared October 5, 2017

Overview

Nebraska's Bridge to Independence Program (B2i) was designed to maximize opportunities and supports for the young adult ages 19 and 20 as they transition from foster care to adulthood. DHHS started serving young adults in the B2i program in October of 2014.

The Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) was given the responsibility of oversight by the Legislature to ensure that the B2i program is meeting the needs of young adults who are enrolled. The FCRO began work immediately on the case review tools and development of the process for reviews. Along the way the FCRO consulted with young adults, DHHS, the Children's Commission, and B2i committees to ensure that the case review process, data collection tools, and data to be collected were aligned with the program's goals.

DHHS Independence Coordinators (ICs) have been working individually with the young adults enrolled in the program since October 2014. The Young Adult (YA) and their IC develop a plan and then work on the goals they have outlined. The IC assists the young adult through "authentic engagement". This ultimately means that the young adult is the decision maker and the IC provides adult counsel and guidance. This ensures that the young adult is taking ownership for their choices and decisions while they have the support of their IC.

Starting in February 2015 the Foster Care Review Office began case reviews with young adults that had been enrolled in the B2i program for at least 4 months, with the goal of reviewing the cases of young adults every 6 months thereafter, until they age out of the program at 21. Starting in September 2015 the FCRO began second

case reviews of those enrolled in the program. As of June 2017 the FCRO has conducted 262 first reviews, 123 second reviews, 24 third reviews, and 2 fourth reviews for a total of 411 reviews. This report covers the 2016-17 fiscal year and comparison data between the first and second reviews.

As part of the case review process, the FCRO Program Coordinator notifies DHHS IC Supervisors and the IC of the young adult's cases that are eligible for review during the next two months. The IC notifies the young adult and a time is scheduled that best accommodates the young adult. The Program Coordinator prepares for the review with the YA by first reviewing NFOCUS and JUSTICE. During the review the Program Coordinator gathers information and insight as to how the program is working from the IC and the YA's perspective.

Initially cases were being reviewed "face to face" in a place of the young adult's choosing. However, conference calls became the standard vehicle for case reviews with the young adult due to scheduling conflicts with the young adult, distance, and the need to be flexible in order to meet with the young adult at a time that best met their work and school schedules. Starting March 2017, the FCRO began conducting paper reviews when contact with the YA had not been possible. To supplement these paper reviews and include YA voice in the review process, the FCRO has developed a survey for the young adults to complete. This survey is available on the FCRO website, but has not yet been utilized. The final case review report is submitted to the court, the YA's attorney if one has been appointed, the IC, and the YA.

Review Results

During State Fiscal Year 2016-17, the FCRO conducted 200 reviews for 163 young adults.

1st Review	105
2nd Review	71
3rd Review	22
4th Review	2
Grand Total	200

The majority, 156 (78.0%) of those reviews were conducted by phone with the young adult present. The remaining 44 (22.0%) were completed through file review and discussions with the ICs.

For the 47 young adults reviewed more than once during this time period, the results from their most recent reviews will be reported. Of the 163 young adults reviewed from October 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017:

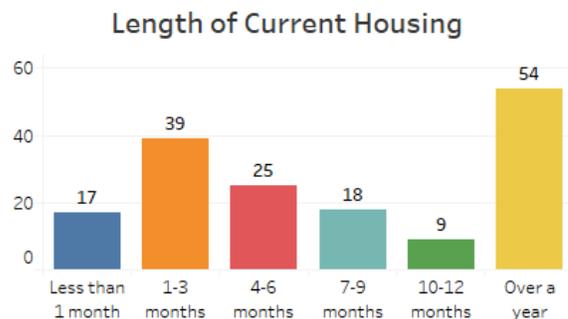
Demographics

- 101 (62.0%) are female and 62 (38.0%) are male.
- Race
 - White 112 (68.7%)
 - Black 35 (21.5%)
 - Two or More Races 7 (4.3%)
 - American Indian 4 (2.5%)
 - Other 4 (2.5%)
 - Asian 1 (.6%)
- Ethnicity
 - Non-Hispanic 138 (84.6%)
 - Hispanic 22 (13.5%)
 - Unknown 3 (1.8%)

- Service Area
 - Eastern 82 (50.3%)
 - Southeast 34 (20.9%)
 - Northern 15 (9.2%)
 - Central 21 (12.9%)
 - Western 11 (6.8%)

Housing

- More than half of the young adults were currently living in either independent (68, 41.7%) or shared housing (29, 17.8%). The next largest group was living with a relative (22, 13.58%). Additional living arrangements include:
 - Couch surfing 9 (5.5%)
 - With Parent/Guardian 9 (5.5%)
 - Dorm/campus housing 6 (3.7%)
 - Foster home 6 (3.7%)
 - Group home 5 (3.1%)
 - Host home/DD foster care 3 (1.8%)
 - Transitional housing 2 (1.2%)
 - Jail 2 (1.2%)
 - Other 2 (1.2%)
- One third of the young adults reviewed (54, 33.1%) had lived in their current housing for over a year.



- 55 (33.7%) of the young adults reviewed have a housing service need that should be addressed prior to turning 18.

Family Status

- 157 of the young people reviewed were single, 5 married, and 1 divorced.
- Of the reviewed young people, 38 (23.3%) were parenting. Of those 38:
 - 28 were parenting 1 child
 - 8 were parenting 2 children
 - 2 were parenting 3 children.
- Of the women reviewed (101), 11 (10.9%) were pregnant.

Program Eligibility

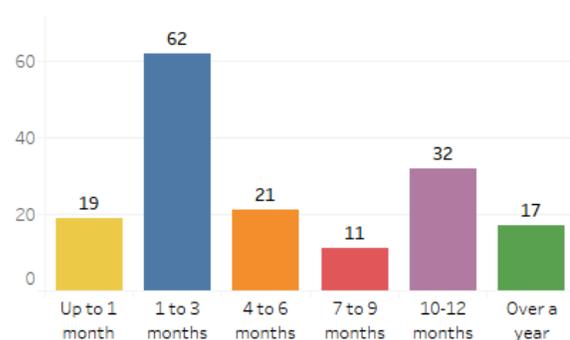
- The program eligibility for the young adults at the most recent review was:
 - Employed 80 hours/Month 111
 - Enrolled in school 44
 - Special Programs/Barriers 36
 - Medically or DD Incapable 4

**31 young adults are dually eligible through employment and schooling. 1 young adult is dually eligible through employment and medical/dd.*
- 12 (12.6%) of the reviewed cases were IV-E eligible.

Employment

- Most of the young adults are working either part time 68 (41.7%) or full time 37 (22.7%). 42 (25.8%) were seeking employment, while 16 (9.8%) were not seeking employment.
 - Of the 16 not seeking employment, 8 were in school full time and 4 were in school part time.
- For over 1/3 of the young people reviewed, their longest stretch of employment was 1 to 3 months (62, 38.0%). 49 (30.1%) of the young adults

had a longest single employment of at least 10 months.



- 65 (39.9%) of the young adults reviewed have an employment service need that should be addressed prior to turning 21.

School

- 68 (41.7%) of the young adults were enrolled in school.
 - 35 were pursuing post-secondary education
 - 23 were enrolled in high school
 - 10 were enrolled in a specialty school.
- 93 (57.1%) of the young adults reviewed have an education service need that should be addressed prior to turning 21.

Relationships

- 158 of the 163 reviewed young adults had a plan for maintaining permanent relationships.
 - Of the 160 young adults with siblings, 105 (65.6%) have maintained a relationship with their siblings. 22 (13.8%) did not maintain the relationship, for 32 (20.0%) the relationship status with siblings was unknown, and 1 reported their sibling(s) refused to maintain the relationship.

- Relationships with mothers were maintained by 73 (44.8%) of the young adults, 55 (33.7%) were not maintaining the relationship, and for 7 (4.3%) young adults it was not in their best interest. This question was not applicable for 10 young adults whose mothers were deceased or lost rights, and information on relationship with mother was not available for 18 young adults.
- Relationships with fathers were maintained for 46 (28.2%) of the young adults, 75 (46.0%) were not maintaining the relationship, and for 4 (2.5%) young adults it was not in their best interest. This question was not applicable for 10 of the reviewed young adults, and information on relationship with father was not available for 28 young adults.
- The majority of young adults, 110 (67.5%), were maintaining a relationship with a family member other than a parent or sibling. The remainder were either not maintaining this relationship (33, 20.2%), it was not in their best interest (1, 0.1%), or this information was not available (19, 6.3%).
- The vast majority (159, 97.5%) of the young adults were maintaining at least one non-relative relationship. This information was unknown for 3 young adults, and one young adult was not maintaining a non-relative permanent relationship.

Records

- Of the young adults reviewed, 153 (93.9%) had a copy of their birth certificate, 6 (3.7%) were in the process of getting it. This information was unknown for 3 young adults; one young adult did not have a birth certificate and was not in the process of getting it.
- 97 (59.5%) had a driver's license, 59 (36.2%) had a state ID. 6 did not have either form of ID, and this information was unknown for 1.
- 141 (86.5%) of the young adults have their Proof of Ward letter, 14 (8.6%) were in the process of getting it. This information was unknown for 7 young adults, and 1 did not have it and was not in the process of getting it.
- 148 (90.7%) of the young adults had a health insurance card; 9 (5.5%) did not and 6 (3.7%) were in the process of obtaining one.
- 133 (81.6%) of the young adults received information on designating a healthcare decision-maker in case of incapacitation. 21 (12.9%) were either unable to recall if they received this information or documentation was unavailable, and 9 (5.5%) were in the process of obtaining this information.
- 147 (90.1%) of the young adults received a copy of their healthcare records, 7 (4.3%) were in the process of obtaining them. This information was unknown for 8 young adults and 1 did not have their healthcare records and was not in the process of getting them.

- Similarly, 149 (91.4%) had received their education records, and 6 (3.7%) were in the process of obtaining them. This information was unknown for 7 young adults and 1 did not have their education records and was not in the process of getting them.

- Health insurance 6 (3.7%)
- Credit report 5 (3.1%)

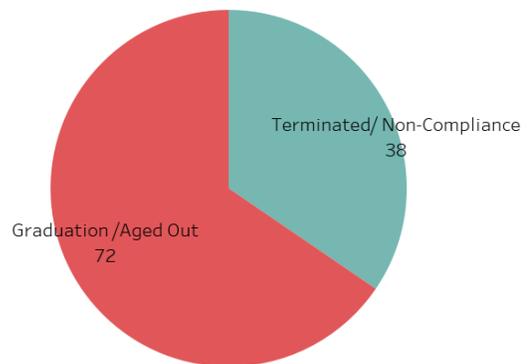
Court Information

- 7 young adults have a CASA and 5 young adults have a GAL.
- Of the young adults reviewed, 53 (32.5%) have a court-appointed attorney.
 - All young adults were notified of their right to have an attorney.
- A future permanency hearing was set for 115 (70.1%) of the young adults in B2i.
 - 32 (19.6%) will not schedule another hearing prior to aging out.
 - 16 (9.8%) did not have a future permanency hearing set, and it was unclear if they would schedule a future hearing.

Service Needs

- Of the young adults reviewed, 136 (83.4%) had a need for services prior to turning 21. These needs include:
 - Education 93 (57.1%)
 - Transportation 67 (41.1%)
 - Employment 65 (39.9%)
 - Money management 59 (36.2%)
 - Housing 55 (33.7%)
 - Transition planning 52 (31.9%)
 - Mental health 45 (27.6%)
 - Other life skills 41 (25.2%)
 - Financial support 28 (17.2%)
 - Dev. disability 17 (10.4%)
 - Legal service 17 (10.4%)
 - Physical health 16 (9.8%)

Program Exit



During the 2016-17 fiscal year, 110 young adults exited the B2i program. 38 (34.5%) were terminated for non-compliance or chose to leave the program. Nearly twice as many, 72 (65.5%), graduated or aged-out of the program.

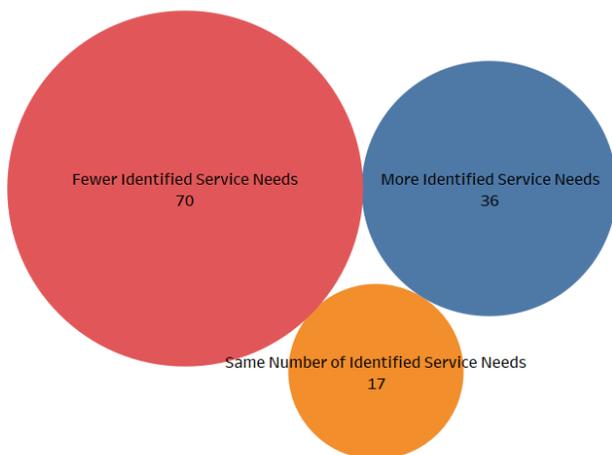
Service Needs Changes

The final section of this report looks at all YAs who have had a first and second review since joining B2i. The FCRO has conducted at least two reviews on 123 young adults in the B2i program. The following information compares the changes in service needs between the first and the second reviews.

During the first review, the 123 young adults averaged 4.2 service needs each. During the second review, that number dropped to an average of 3.4. The reduction in service needs could be explained in one of two ways. First, as young adults progress in the program, their needs are addressed and services are no longer required. Second, YAs and their ICs

may start to focus on particular needs at different stages of the program. For example, a YA may begin the program with an identified education need because of an intention to begin a college program. After six months, the young adult may decide they no longer want to attend college, and so that need is no longer necessary. When interpreting this information, it is also important to understand how a need is identified in a B2i Review by the FCRO. A service need is identified if it is a part of the current program goals or a YA specifically mentions the need during the interviews. If a need is present, but not documented in NFOCUS or mentioned during the review, it will not be included in the data.

Looking more closely at service need changes for the young adults in B2i, the majority of young adults (70, 56.9%) had fewer service needs at the second review, nearly 1/3 (36, 29.2%) had more identified service needs, and the remaining 17 (13.8%) had the same number of identified service needs.



The final table examines the specific service need changes for the young adults in B2i. Each service need is broken down

into three categories: present at both reviews, present only during the first review, and present only during the second review.

Service Need	1 st and 2 nd Review	1 st Review Only	2 nd Review Only
Education (n=105)	61 (58.1%)	20 (19.0%)	24 (22.9%)
Employment (n=64)	20 (31.3%)	25 (39.7%)	19 (29.7%)
Housing (n=50)	9 (18.0%)	22 (44.0%)	19 (38.0%)
Mental Health (n=44)	14 (31.8%)	17 (38.6%)	13 (29.5%)
Physical Health (n=29)	2 (6.9%)	17 (68.6%)	10 (34.5%)
Developmental Disability (n=11)	10 (90.9%)	1 (9.1%)	
Transportation (n=72)	36 (50.0%)	7 (9.7%)	29 (40.3%)
Financial Support (n=38)	7 (18.4%)	16 (42.1%)	15 (39.5%)
Legal (n=13)	2 (15.4%)	4 (30.8%)	7 (53.8%)
Money Mngmnt (n=66)	18 (27.3%)	31 (47.0%)	17 (25.8%)
Other Life Skills (n=47)	9 (19.1%)	29 (61.7%)	9 (19.1%)
Transition Planning (n=58)	7 (12.1%)	29 (50.0%)	22 (37.9%)
Documents (n=28)	6 (21.4%)	20 (71.4%)	2 (7.1%)
Credit Report (n=23)	1 (4.3%)	16 (69.6%)	6 (26.1%)
Health Insurance (n=6)	2 (33.3%)	3 (50.0%)	1 (16.7%)
Other Services* (n=58)	17 (29.3%)	16 (27.6%)	25 (43.1%)

*Changes in "Other Services" should be interpreted with caution, as they may be two different services in the first and second review.

The highlighted cells indicate the most frequently occurring category. Education, developmental disability, and transportation needs were most likely to be identified during both reviews. Employment, housing, mental health, physical health, financial support, money management, other life skills, transition

planning, documents assistance, credit report, and health insurance service needs were most likely to be identified during the 1st review. Legal and other services were more likely to be identified during the second review.

Limitations

Equating changes in service needs with program success would be premature. The removal of a service need from the first review to the second review could mean the need was remediated, but it could also represent a change in goals of the young adult and IC, or a lack of documentation about a goal. Similarly, the presence of a service need at both the first and second review does not indicate that the young adult has not made progress on said goal.

Indicators of progress during the program and outcomes after the program are not available via the current data tracking mechanisms.

Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Jodie Austin	Voting	President , KVC Nebraska	A representative of a child welfare service agency
Vernon Davis	Voting	Young Adult Previously in Foster Care , Young Adult Previously in Foster Care	A young adult currently or previously in foster care
Mary Fraser Meints	Voting	Executive Director , Youth Emergency Services	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency
Alyson Goedken	Voting	Administrator , DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services	A representative of the Executive Branch of government
Brandy Gustoff	Voting	Program Manager – Transition Services , Omaha Home for Boys (Jacobs' Place)	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency
Sarah Helvey	Voting	Program Director / Staff Attorney – Child Welfare Program , Nebraska Appleseed	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Augusta Kamara	Voting	Former Youth in Foster Care / UNL Student , Former Youth in Foster Care / UNL Student	A young adult currently or previously in foster care
Doug Lenz	Voting	Director , Central Plains Center for Services	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency
Mary Jo Pankoke (Co-Chair)	Voting	President , Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Amy Peters	Voting	Former Youth in Foster Care / Law Clerk , Former Youth in Foster Care/Nebraska Appleseed	A young adult currently or previously in foster care
Jill Schubauer	Voting	Regional Youth Specialist , Region 3 Behavioral Health Services	A representative of a Behavioral Health Organization
Deb Shuck	Voting	Central Service Navigator for the Older Youth System of Care , CAPWN	A representative of a child welfare service agency
Jennifer Skala	Voting	Senior Vice President of Community Impact , Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Juliet Summers	Voting	Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice , Voices for Children in Nebraska	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Susan Thomas	Voting	CASA Volunteer , Nebraska CASA Association	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Lana Verbrigghe	Voting	Director of Child Welfare Services , Child Saving Institute	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency

Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Sen. Kate Bolz	Ex-Officio	Senator , Nebraska Legislature - District 29	A representative of the Legislative Branch of government
Jeanne Brandner (Co-Chair)	Ex-Officio	Deputy Administrator of the Division of Juvenile Services , Administrative Office of Probation	A representative of the Judicial Branch of government
Judge Douglas Johnson	Ex-Officio	Judge of the Separate Juvenile Court , Douglas County	A representative of the Judicial Branch of government
Timoree Klingler	Ex-Officio	Legislative Aide to Senator Sara Howard , Nebraska Legislative Council	Representative of the Legislative Branch of Government
Katie McLeese Stephenson	Ex-Officio	Director , Child Guidance Center	A representative of a child welfare service agency
Kim Thomas	Ex-Officio	Executive Director , Douglas County Nebraska CASA	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Deb VanDyke-Ries	Ex-Officio	Director , Nebraska Court Improvement Project	A representative of the Judicial Branch of government