

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

November 7, 2018

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Gold's Building, Room 531, 1033 O St, Lincoln, NE 68508

**I. Call to Order and Welcome**

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Co-Chairs, Jeanne Brandner and Christina Lloyd, called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 10:05 a.m.

**II. Roll Call and Introductions**

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***Committee Members present (11):***

|                 |                       |                         |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Whitney Beck    | Amanda McGill Johnson | Susan Thomas            |
| Sarah Helvey    | Bailey Perry          | Lana Verbrigghe (10:43) |
| Doug Lenz       | Sarah Riffel          | Cristen White           |
| Christina Lloyd | Juliet Summers        |                         |

***Committee Members absent (3):***

|              |                    |                 |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Vernon Davis | Mary Fraser Meints | Nanette Simmons |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------------|

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

|                                  |                  |                              |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Jeanne Brandner                  | Jennifer Skala   | Deb VanDyke-Ries             |
| Katie McLeese Stephenson (10:35) | Kristen Stiffler | Senator Anna Wishart (10:45) |

***Ex-Officio Members absent (4):***

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Senator Kate Bolz | Candi Marcantel |
| Brandy Gustoff    | Kim Thomas      |

A quorum was established.

***Guests in Attendance (7):***

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Dr. Katie Bass.....  | Foster Care Review Office                      |
| Deanna Brakhage..... | DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services |
| Amanda Felton.....   | Nebraska Children’s Commission                 |
| Chris Jones.....     | Nebraska Children’s Commission                 |

*a. Notice of Publication*

Recorder for the meeting, Amanda Felton, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meeting and Nebraska Children’s Commission website in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. The publication would be kept as a permanent attachment with the meeting minutes.

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

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

**III. Approval of Agenda**

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It was moved by Sarah Helvey and seconded by Susan Thomas to approve the [agenda](#) as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (10):**

|                 |                       |               |
|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Whitney Beck    | Amanda McGill Johnson | Susan Thomas  |
| Sarah Helvey    | Bailey Perry          | Cristen White |
| Doug Lenz       | Sarah Riffel          |               |
| Christina Lloyd | Juliet Summers        |               |

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (4):**

Vernon Davis  
Mary Fraser Meints

Nanette Simmons  
Lana Verbrigghe

**MOTION CARRIED****IV. Approval of Minutes**

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It was moved by Susan Thomas to approve the minutes of the June 7, 2018 minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Juliet Summers. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (10):**

|                 |                       |               |
|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Whitney Beck    | Amanda McGill Johnson | Susan Thomas  |
| Sarah Helvey    | Bailey Perry          | Cristen White |
| Doug Lenz       | Sarah Riffel          |               |
| Christina Lloyd | Juliet Summers        |               |

**AGAINST (0):****ABSTAINED (0):****ABSENT (4):**

Vernon Davis  
Mary Fraser Meints

Nanette Simmons  
Lana Verbrigghe

**MOTION CARRIED****V. Co-Chair Report**

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The Co-Chairs welcomed the several new members and reviewed the role of the B2i Advisory Committee. It was explained that the group was charged with creating an annual report that outlined recommendations for the Bridge to Independence Program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance.

Policy Analyst, Chris Jones, provided information on the current structure and sunset date of the Nebraska Children's Commission and its subgroups. Discussion occurred on the impact that would be felt by the B2i Advisory Committee depending on the direction the Commission would move. Members expressed a desire to assist in outreach and support of the efforts of the Commission and subgroups.

**VI. Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup Update**

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Dr. Katie Bass, Chair of the Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup and Research Director with the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO), provided an update from the group. She provided a summary of the recent efforts towards an external evaluation from ChildTrends. The FCRO and the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCF) were working to pull together system data for de-identification prior to sharing it with ChildTrends. Bass explained that while there no current definition for program "success," the evaluation would provide ways to measure success based on provided data. This would allow for DHHS to internally evaluate the program over time.

**VII. Department of Health and Human Services Update**

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Deanna Brakhage, Program Specialist with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), shared information on the program's [Continuous Quality Improvement \(CQI\) process](#). Data discussed included eligibility programs, updates on IV-E funding eligibility, other benefits received by participants, exit reasons, numbers on young adults enrolling in the program after aging out of care, and the number of young adults served in the program each year.

Brakhage highlighted the slides showing the drop in IV-E eligibility since July. The decline was due to the lack of specific statutory language regarding reasonable efforts towards independence. She noted that CIP was partnering with DHHS to ensure that their quarterly review included education on this issue. Members discussed the potential for a future recommendation to update language within state statute to include the required reasonable efforts terminology.

When reviewing the exit reasons, members inquired into ways to work with young adults dealing with mental health challenges that prevent them from meeting program requirements. Brakhage touched on the recent efforts of DCFS to communicate with the Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to ensure that Independence Coordinators can assist B2i participants in locating primary care physicians and aid in the transfer of medical records from their pediatric doctors.

Members also raised concern regarding the decrease in youth aging out that enroll in the B2i program within 30 days. With several Independence Coordinator staff positions vacant, the caseloads of current workers was prohibiting them from contacting with youth prior to aging out of the system.

There was also comment on the low number of participants receiving child care benefits. Brakhage provided a verbal breakdown of the current numbers which were 10 pregnant and 24 parenting. Information collected from the Independence Coordinators revealed numerous reasons why participants were not utilizing child care assistance. Reasons included a mistrust in child care institutions or a preference for family to watch children, being above the maximum income eligibility, the choice to be a stay at home parent, and child support sanctions. It was requested to include data on pregnant and parenting youth in future packets.

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### **VIII. Foster Care Review Office Update**

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Dr. Bass explained that the FCRO performed reviews of B2i participant cases every six months. Through partnership with DHHS, the FCRO was not examining participant goals over a series of life skill categories such as education, transportation, and others. In their reviews, FCRO staff examine the set goals of each participant and measure the progress. She explained that outlining specific goals assists in determining characteristics of the population and reasons why participants may or may not become proficient in certain areas.

It question was raised if young adults in the program were offered an opportunity to meet other program participants. While there was no Department sponsored initiative, the efforts of the Connected Youth Initiative were raised. Bass noted that the FCRO did currently collect data on personal supports in the participant's lives.

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### **IX. Review of Past Recommendations**

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Co-Chair Brandner directed members to the [handout reviewing past recommendations of the Committee](#). Outlined below are the highlights of the discussion:

- Independence Coordinator contact with youth prior to aging out
  - One area of discussion included how to ensure that youth were receiving information about the B2i program in a timely manner. This issue could be targeted by ensuring that staff caseloads are at a reasonable level so that outreach to youth can occur at least 6 months prior to aging out of care.
- Staff Caseloads
  - Members cited their past recommendation of caseload size ranging from 15 in the rural areas up to 20 in urban areas. This recommendation took into consideration both the added travel distance for rural staff as well as the potential for additional work time in cases where there may be fewer services and resources available for the young adult.
- Cross-walking efforts between the B2i Program and the Family First Preservation Services Act (FFPSA)
  - As FFPSA is implemented in Nebraska, we will want to ensure communication is occurring on similar issues, particularly work happening around pregnant and parenting young adults.
- Expansion of the program to similar populations
  - It has been a consistent recommendation for the past several reports that the B2i program be expanded to young adults exiting the juvenile justice system without support.
  - Members discussed the hope for the current evaluation efforts to provide concrete data showing the benefit of the program. That information could be used to justify the expansion of the program to similar populations including juvenile justice involved young adults.
- Extended Guardianship and Adoption Assistance
  - Statute requires that the Committee provide recommendations on the issues of extended guardianship and adoption assistance.
  - It was noted that this would be another good area to collaborate with FFPSA efforts.
- Statutory Language Updates to Include Reasonable Efforts Findings
  - As discussed in the DHHS update, members were interested in researching the potential to add statutory language that outlined the requirements for reasonable efforts toward permanency within the court recommendations.

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### **X. Discussion of Action Plan**

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Members agreed that the areas identify while reviewing the past recommendations would be the areas of action in the next year.

**XI. Public Comment**

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The Co-Chairs welcomed public comment. No public comment was provided.

**XII. New Business**

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There was no new business.

**XIII. Upcoming Meeting Planning**

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The Co-Chairs noted that a meeting would be scheduled sometime for March or April of 2019.

**XIV. Adjourn**

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The meeting adjourned at 12:43 p.m.