Nebraska Children's Commission

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee

Report to the Nebraska Children's Commission, the Governor, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature

November 17, 2015

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

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Report

November 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act (LB 216) was passed in the 2013 legislative session to create an age-appropriate, youth-focused, and voluntary program of services and support to age 21 for young people who age out of foster care. The program has since been titled "Bridge to Independence."

The Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act created an Advisory Committee to make initial recommendations regarding implementation of the program and to provide ongoing oversight. The Advisory Committee, involving a wide variety of professionals and stakeholders, began meeting in July 2013. Six workgroups comprised of Advisory Committee members and other stakeholders were established to cover the following key areas of implementation:

- Policy, Eligibility, and Transition into the Program
- Outreach, Marketing and Communications
- Case Management, Supportive Services and Housing
- Case Oversight
- Evaluation and Data Collection
- Fiscal Monitoring Issues and State-Funded Guardianship

The Advisory Committee reviewed recommendations from the six workgroups. Recommendations that were adopted by the Advisory Committee were included in a report to the Children's Commission on November 19, 2013. The Children's Commission accepted the Advisory Committee's recommendations and submitted them to DHHS, the HHS Committee of the Legislature, and the Governor. The majority of recommendations contained in the 2013 report have been adopted by DHHS or are still under consideration.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) program began on October 1, 2014. Staffing for the program includes two Supervisors and eleven Independence Coordinators. The Department has created many pathways to the B2i program. These pathways include: contacting the Abuse/Neglect Hotline, the Bridge to Independence website, the young person's past or present caseworker or Project Everlast. All sources will lead to the website where the Young Adult can apply for the

program. If a Young Adult prefers, the Department staff will complete an application with them in person or over the phone.

DHHS staff give regular updates on implementation at Advisory Committee meetings. All indications are that implementation is going well and that the program is working as it was intended to work. Young people report having a great relationship with the Independence Coordinators and that they feel comfortable calling their Independence Coordinator when they need something. Attachment 1 to this report contains DHHS' annual data report for the Bridge to Independence program. The report contains several examples of ways the Independence Coordinators have provided assistance and support to young people in the program.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force – The legislation creating the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee included a provision for the committee to develop specific recommendations for expanding to or improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults not eligible for B2i. To develop recommendations, the Advisory Committee created a Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force. Through funding from Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the Task Force was able to utilize the services of Mainspring Consulting to facilitate the development of recommendations. The Task Force was co-chaired by Juliet Summers from Voices for Children and Jeanne Brandner from the Administrative Office of Probation (AOP)..

Prior to the first Task Force meeting, sixteen focus groups were conducted by the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and Voices for Children. Eight focus groups were held with adult participants and included representation from the Through the Eyes of the Child Teams, a collective impact initiative, probation officer teams, the statewide community-based and planning team, the Office of Juvenile Services Subcommittee and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. Eight focus groups were also held with 61 young adult participants who are currently or were formerly involved in the juvenile justice system in Nebraska.

Members of the Task Force and the B2i Advisory Committee agreed that the primary result they want their recommendations to achieve is that **young people who are involved with juvenile justice in Nebraska can make a successful transition to adulthood.** The benefits of vulnerable young people making a successful transition to adulthood are realized in the individual lives of youth as well as in society as a whole, as increased health and well-being, education and earnings, and stable family connections for young people can mean reduced adult criminal justice involvement and reduced use of public assistance benefits.

To achieve this result, members of the B2i Advisory Committee and the Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force put forward the following recommendation:

Young people under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Office of Probation and 3B wards under the jurisdiction of DHHS who are in out-of-home placement at age 18 should be able to voluntarily opt into Bridge to Independence between ages 19-21 if it is determined that it is in their best interest to do so, due to a lack of alternative supports.

The Task Force agreed it was important to build on the success of B2i and felt that certain vulnerable young adults exiting the juvenile justice system require the same level of support as young people exiting the child welfare system. Specifically, the Task Force wanted to ensure that young adults who lack family supports and as a result have no place to go upon exit from juvenile justice out-of-home placements, are able to enter the B2i program. The group agreed that if legislation and implementation of this recommendation moves forward, further work would need to be done to delineate the specific criteria for determining which young people lack support and who would make that determination.

For future consideration, the B2i Advisory Committee and the Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force recommend that expansion of the existing PALS and Central Navigator programs be considered in order to support other young adults in the juvenile justice system that may not need the level of support offered by B2i, but who do need guidance from caring adults and connections to community resources. The Advisory Committee and the Task Force recommend that the following options be carefully reviewed for implementation:

1. **Young people under the jurisdiction of the AOP and 3B wards under the jurisdiction of DHHS who are in out-of-home placement at age 18 should be able to voluntarily receive case management services until they reach age 21.**

   Task Force members believed strongly that young people in juvenile justice out-of-home placements could benefit from intensive case management services and access to a small amount of flexible, needs-based funds focused on helping them achieve self-sufficiency. The Nebraska PALS model and needs-based funds offer an existing model and infrastructure that are currently limited to serving young people in the child welfare system who are transitioning from care, but could be built upon to serve young people in out-of-home placements under juvenile justice jurisdiction.

2. **All young people who receive support and services from the AOP at age 18 can access services from a central navigator until they reach age 21.**

   Nebraska currently operates a Central Navigator Access system for young people transitioning out of the child welfare system that could be utilized to

serve youth exiting juvenile justice. It is designed to ensure that young people can have access to needed supports and services in an effective and timely manner through a systematic approach of collaborative partnerships intended to promote a continuum of care. The system utilizes a youth-centered approach and identifies the range of supports and services available in communities to make efficient and targeted referrals for young people. Nebraska could expand eligibility for this low-cost, low intensity model to young people who have been involved with juvenile justice at age 18 in order to help them access essential supports as they transition to adulthood.

A copy of the full report of the Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force is included in Attachment 2.

Evaluation and Data Workgroup Report

The Evaluation and Data Workgroup of the B2i Advisory Committee reconvened in September 2015 to discuss program processes, review the state statute and previous recommendations and to develop a new set of recommendations for 2016. The Workgroup presented a report on their key findings from current program data and a new set of recommendations at the November 3 Advisory Committee meeting. Following are some of the recommendations contained in that report. A copy of the full report is included as Attachment 3.

- **Evaluation tool** - Background: Currently, federal requirements mandate that all states implement a 22-question National Young Adults in Transition Database (NYTD) survey with all adults in foster care at 17, and then again at 19 and 21. States have the option of implementing two more comprehensive versions of NYTD instead of the basic 22-question survey: NYTD Plus Abbreviated (57 questions) and NYTD Plus Full (88 questions). Currently, Nebraska is using the 22-question NYTD survey both with NYTD participants (in accordance with federal requirements) and with young people in B2i (at entry into the program and every 6 months after).
  - It is recommended that DHHS switch from the 22-question National Young Adults in Transition Database (NYTD) survey to the NYTD Plus Abbreviated survey and that they survey continue to be administered at the time of entry into the program and every 6 months after.
  - A public/private partnership should be explored to allow a contract with an independent external evaluator for outreach and collection of surveys, as this agency would have more time to dedicate to collecting surveys and could help young people feel more comfortable in answering honestly.
- **Ongoing implementation** – Background: During the process of information-gathering, the Evaluation and Data Workgroup's attention was drawn to several programmatic concerns regarding the program's

current operations. The following recommendations attempt to address, bring to light, and possibly mitigate some of these potential issues.

- Despite recent legislative changes, some young people in the program are still not currently receiving Medicaid; rather, they are being covered by letters of entitlement, meaning that all medical costs are coming out of the program budget and not Medicaid. As of October 2015, five young people were being covered by these letters. It is recommended that all young people in the program be covered by Medicaid rather than letters of entitlement to ensure the sustainability of the program.
- Some issues have been identified with Native young adults being able to access services. For example, young people in the Santee tribe leave the system at 18, and the court order doesn't specify they are being discharged to independence living (which is a required component of eligibility per law). It is recommended that potential solutions to this be explored to ensure Native young adults are able to access the program.
- It is recommended that the Advisory Committee and the FCRO look at the role of Independence Coordinators in helping young people budget, determine how best to spend their stipend, access financial management education, etc. Financial management should be a core component of the B2i program.

Foster Care Review Office Report

The Foster Care Review Office's (FCRO) B2i report on reviews conducted between February 1 and September 30 was presented to the Advisory Committee on November 3, 2015. The report highlighted several systemic issues. Positives that were noted include that the Independence Coordinators are working hard, are developing relationships with the young people and that they are goal driven. Areas needing continued work include reducing turnover in the Independence Coordinators, a greater emphasis on helping young people have a better future vs. focusing on stability, and addressing gaps in services. It was also recommended that there be a greater emphasis on developing independent living skills with 16, 17 & 18 year olds rather than waiting until they enter the B2i program.

Advisory Committee members were impressed with the data the FCRO has collected to date and their openness and commitment to expand their efforts to include data that would help identify systems issues and to assess how well we are helping young people have a better future. The FCRO expressed interest in coordinating with the Evaluation and Data Workgroup of the Advisory Committee to avoid duplication of effort on data collection and analysis activities. The FCRO's Research Director will serve on the Evaluation and Data Workgroup as a first step in improving communication and

promoting collaboration. The Foster Care Review Office Report is included as Attachment 4.

Bridge to Independence

Annual Data Report

October 16, 2015

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

Department of Health & Human Services
DHHS
NEBRASKA

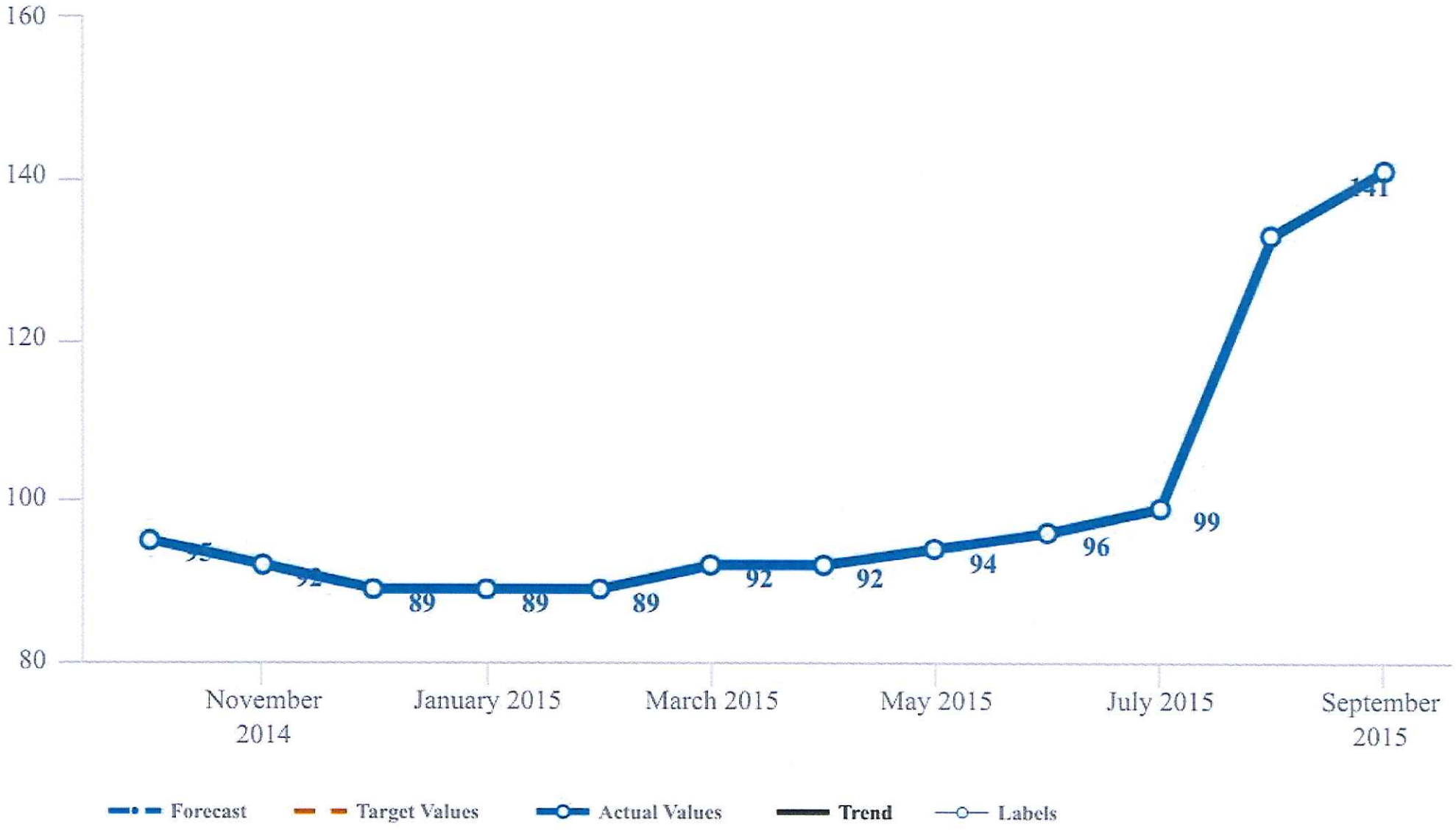
Bridge to Independence

Bridge to Independence

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

Number of enrollees with dependents.

Number of participating youth in-state.

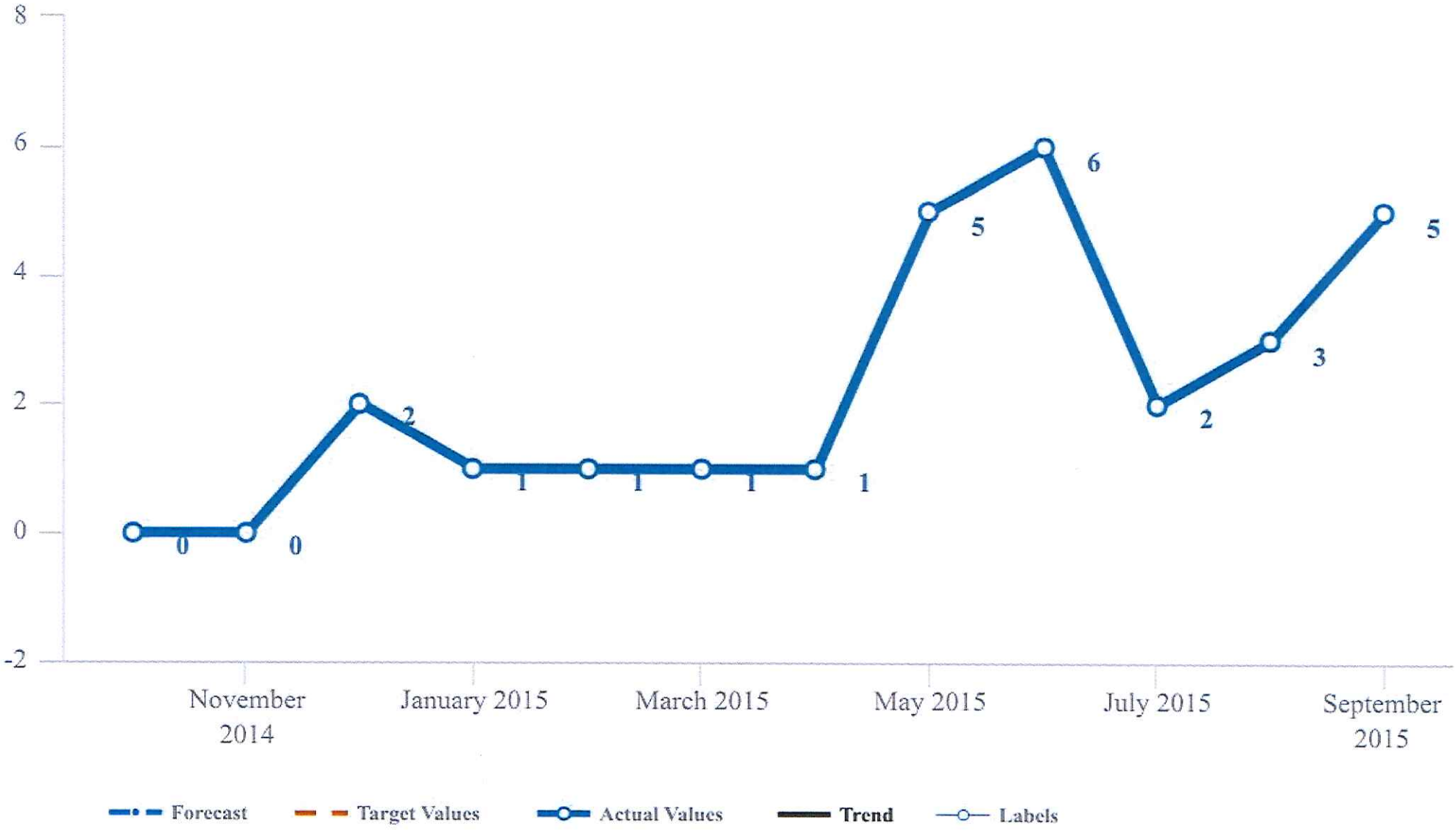


ResultsScorecard.com

Number of participating youth out-of-state.

Number of pregnant / expecting enrollees.

Number of terminations intiated by DHHS within the last month.



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

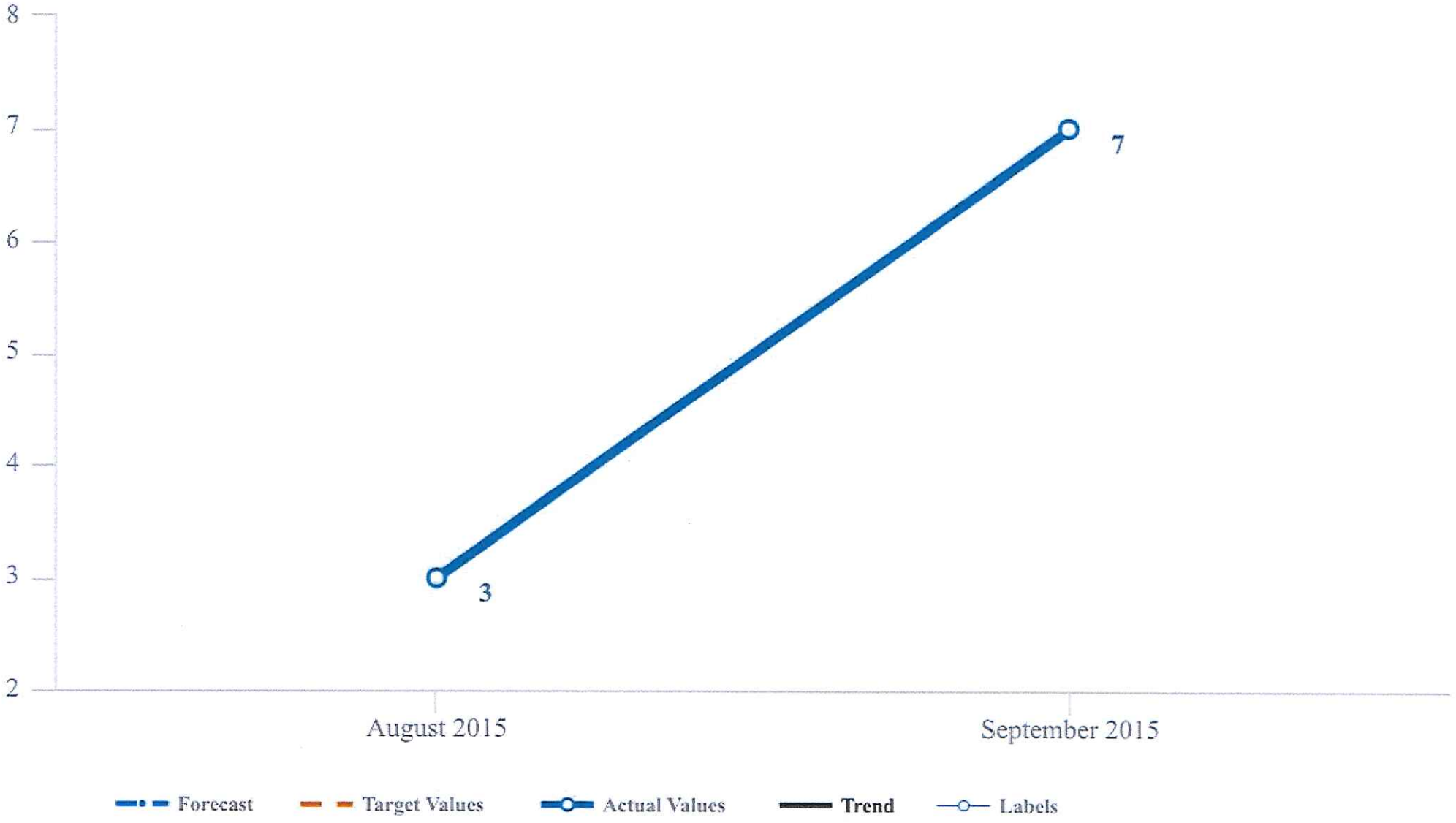
ResultsScorecard.com

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

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

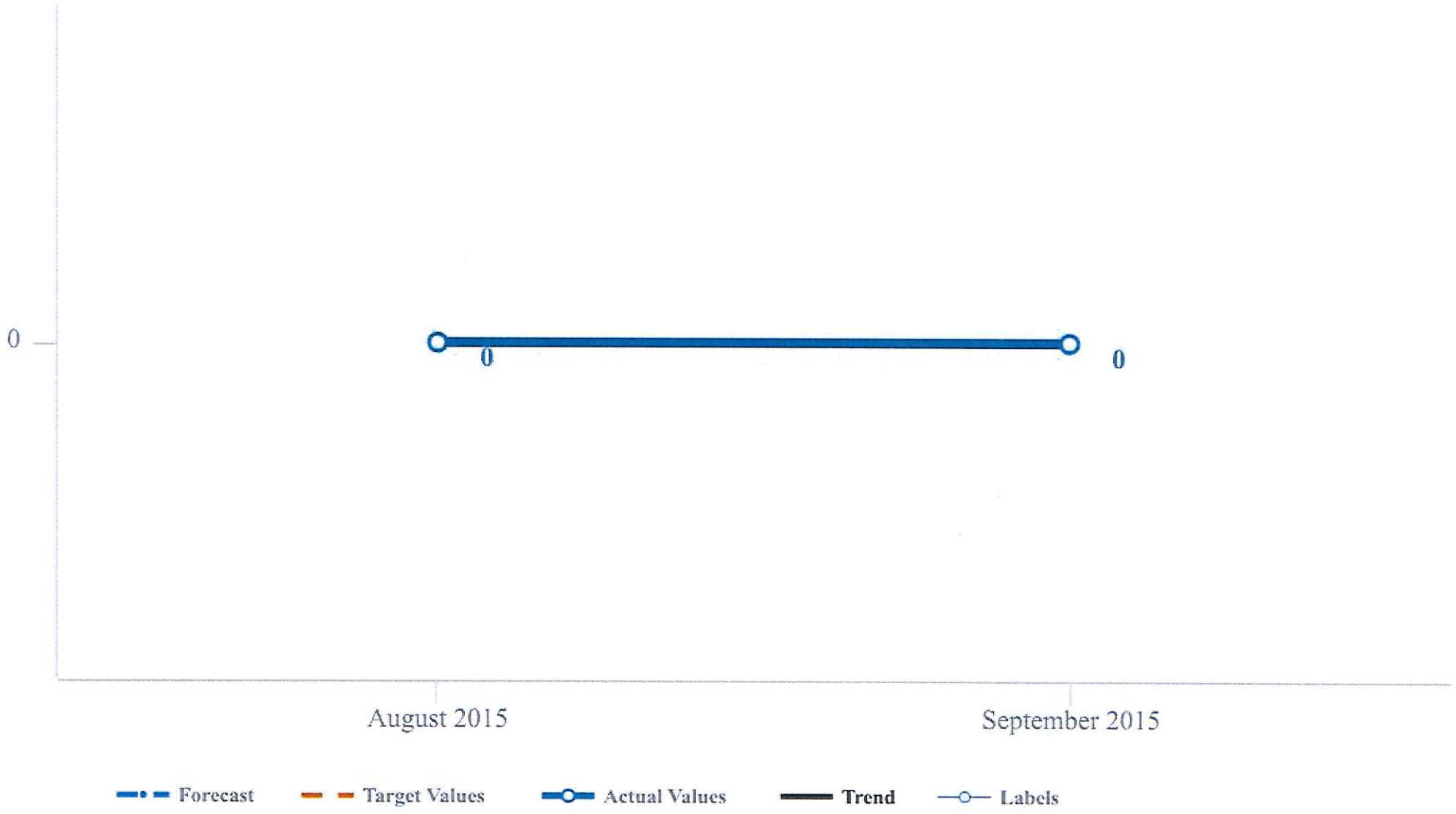
ResultsScorecard.com

Number of young adults who are "couch surfing".

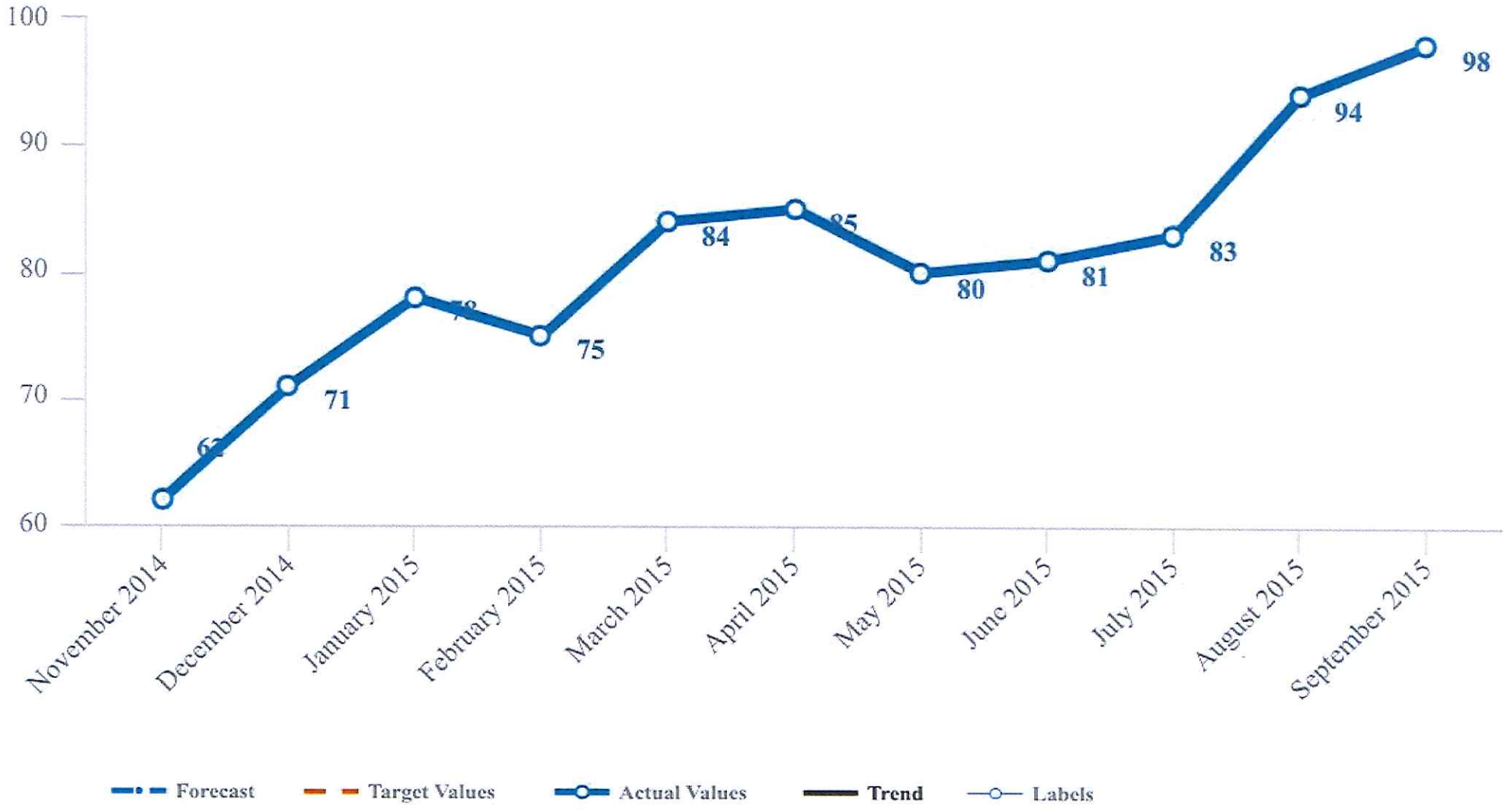


ResultsScorecard.com

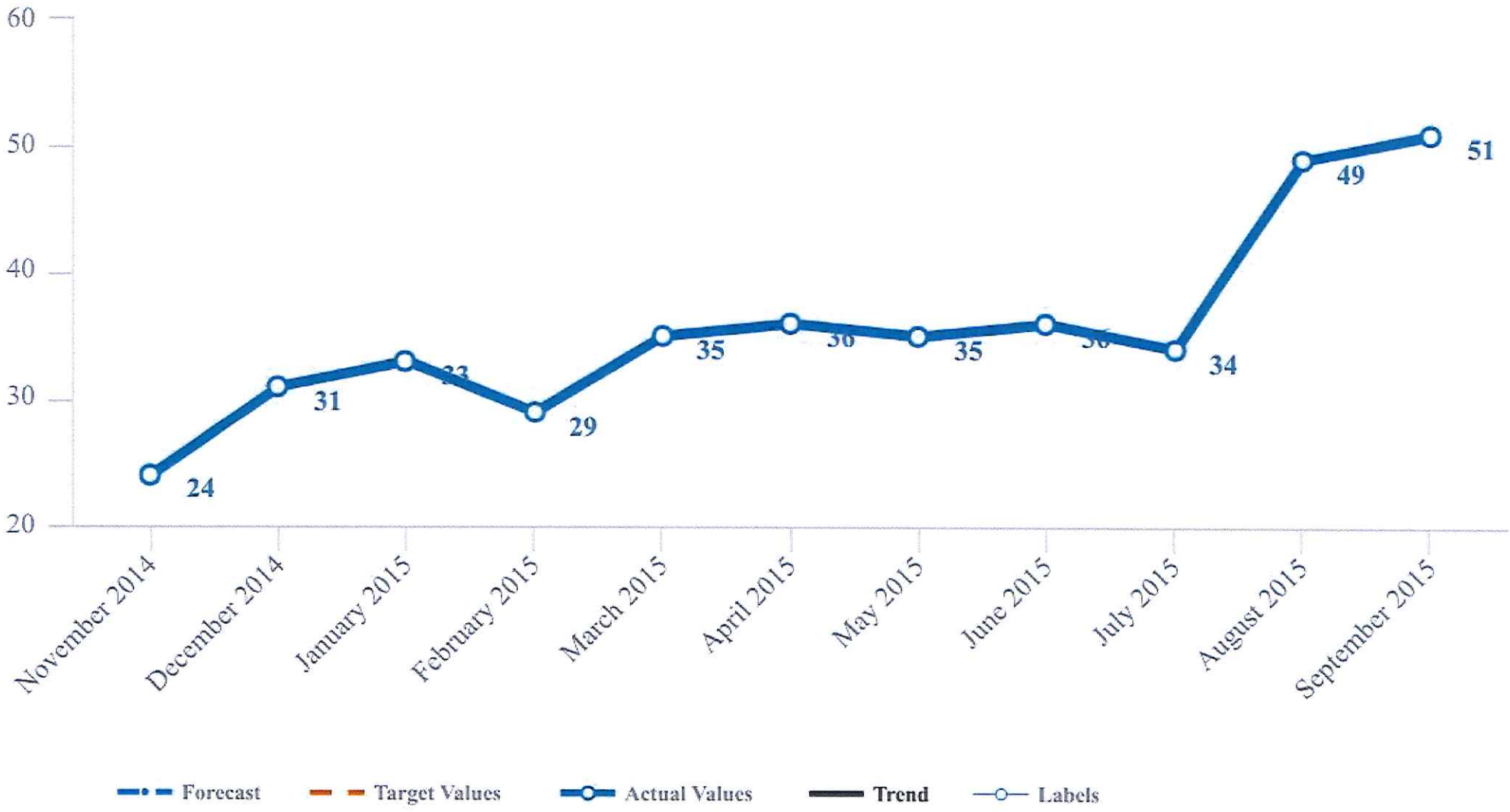
Number of young adults who are in a shelter.



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

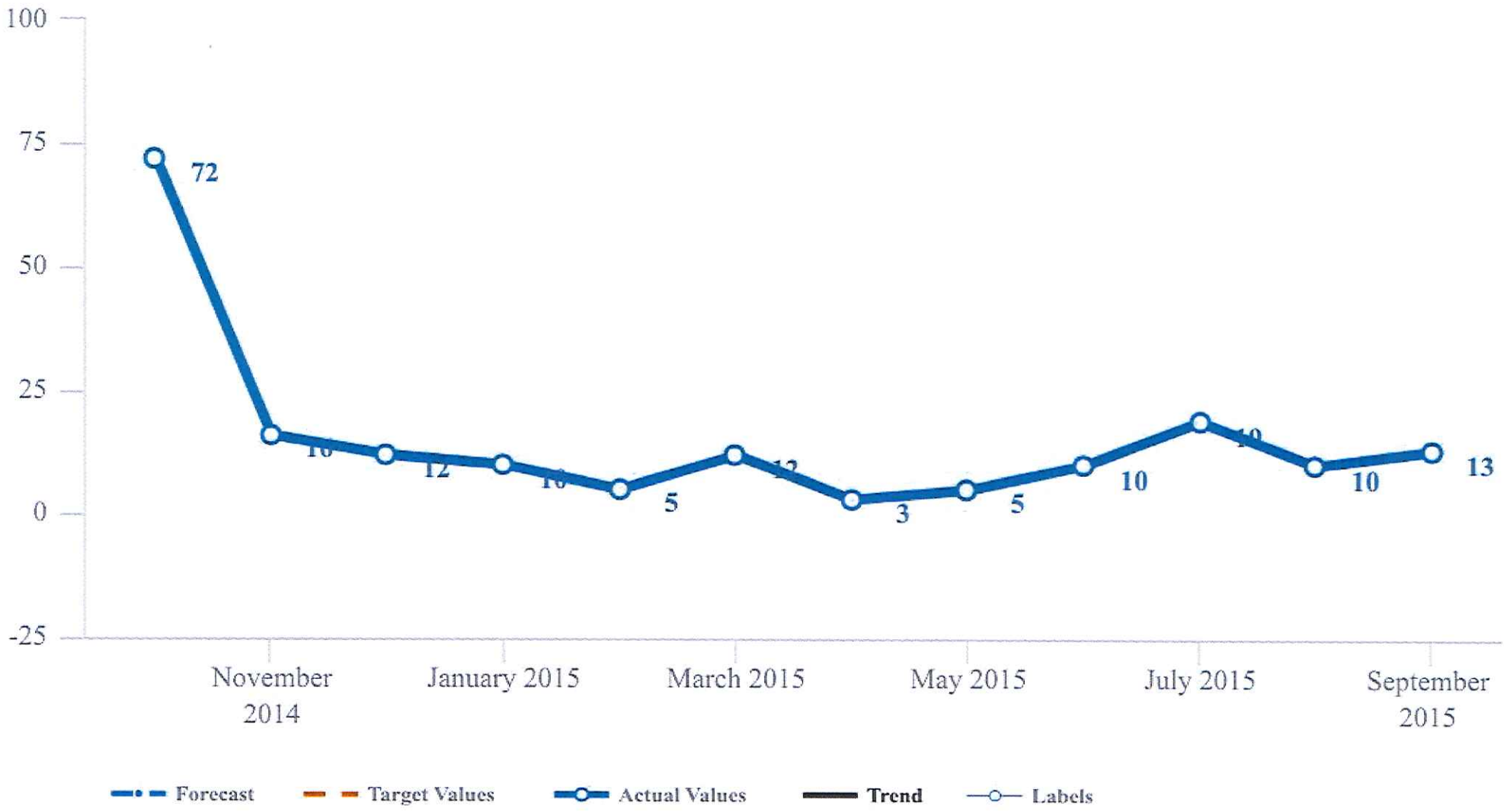


Number of young adults who had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) while a State Ward.



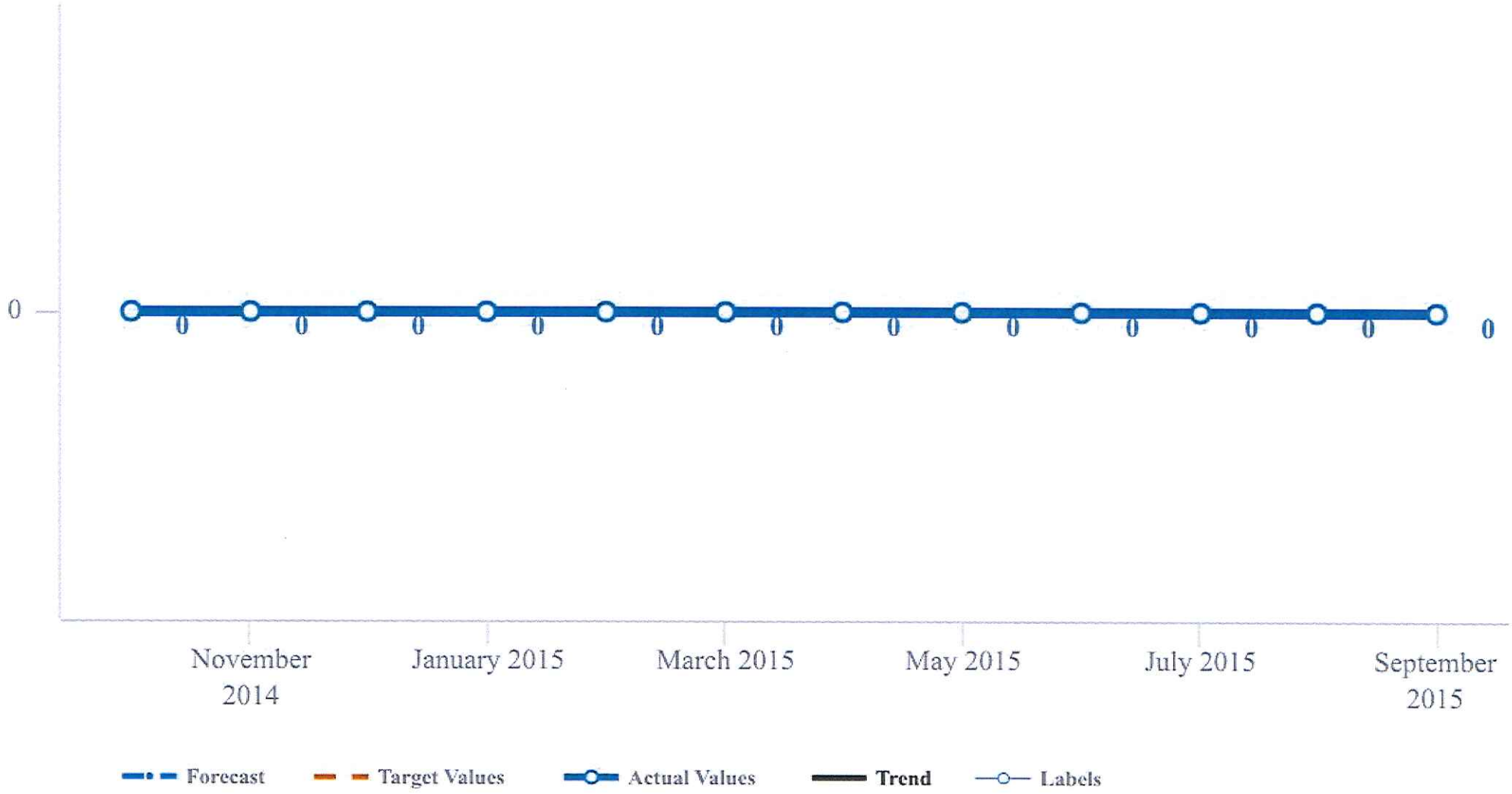
ResultsScorecard.com

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

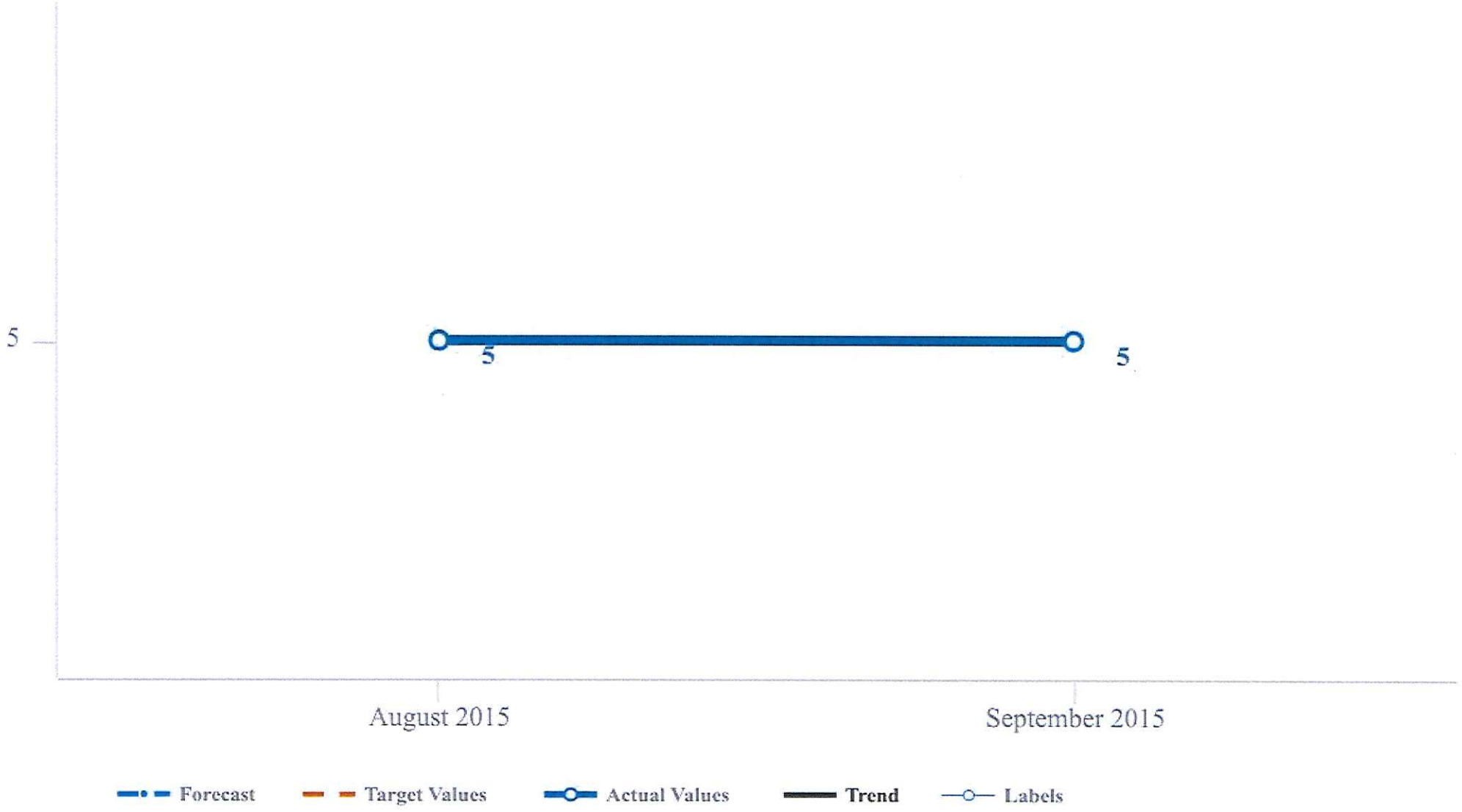


ResultsScorecard.com

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



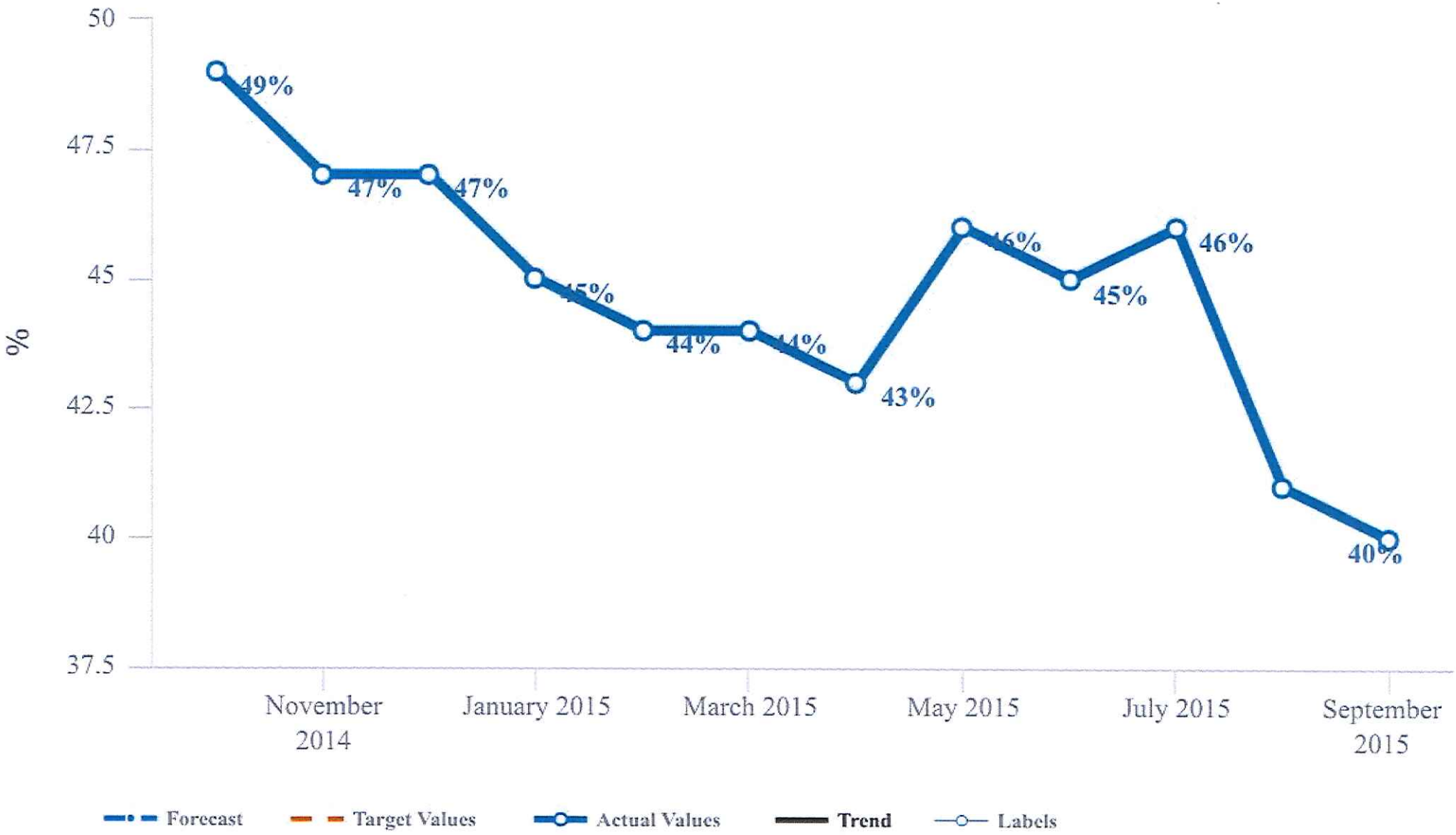
Number of youth with a Letter of Entitlement



Percentage of enrollees in ESA and NSA.

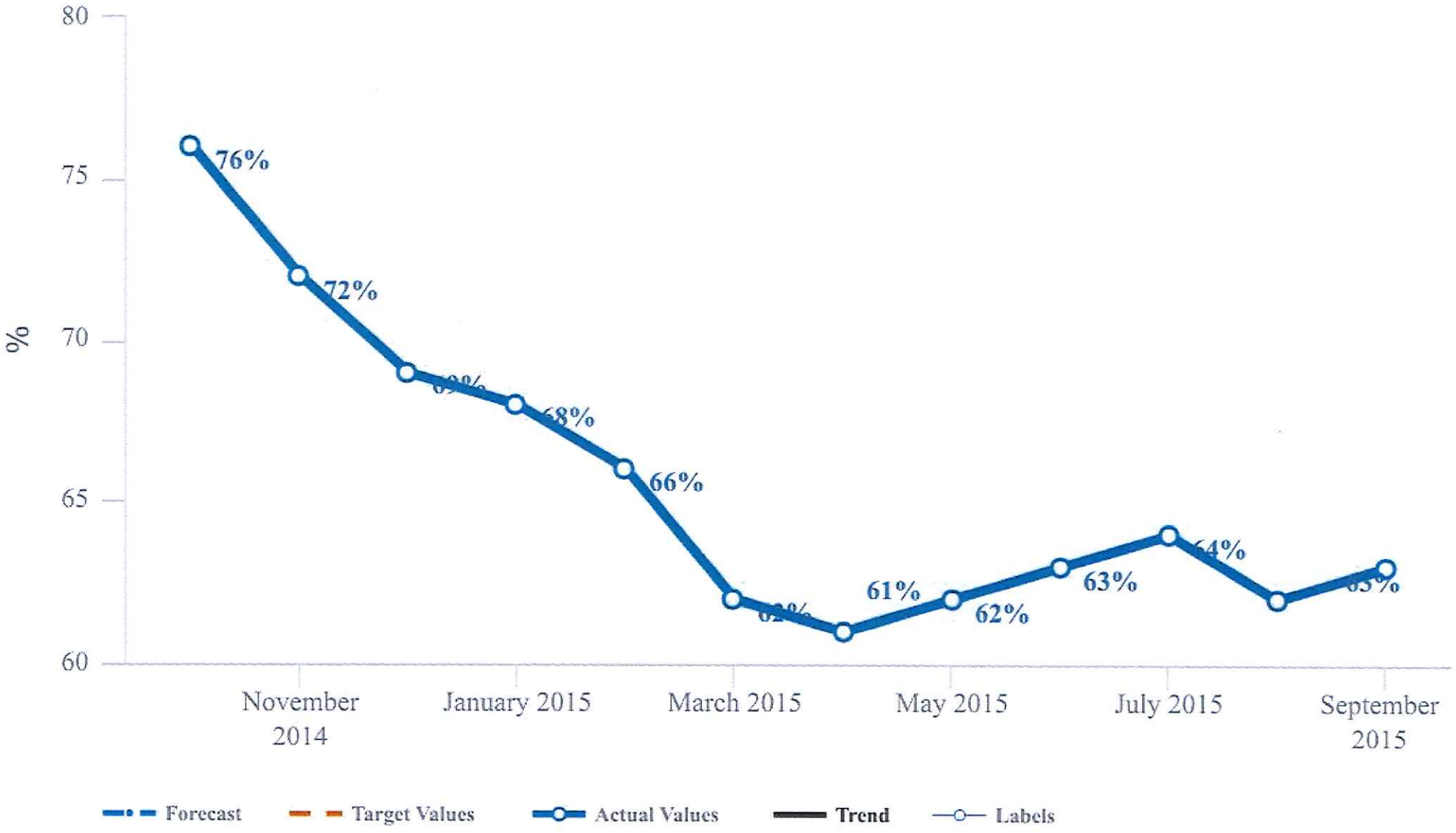
ResultsScorecard.com

Percentage of enrollees in SESA, CSA and WSA.



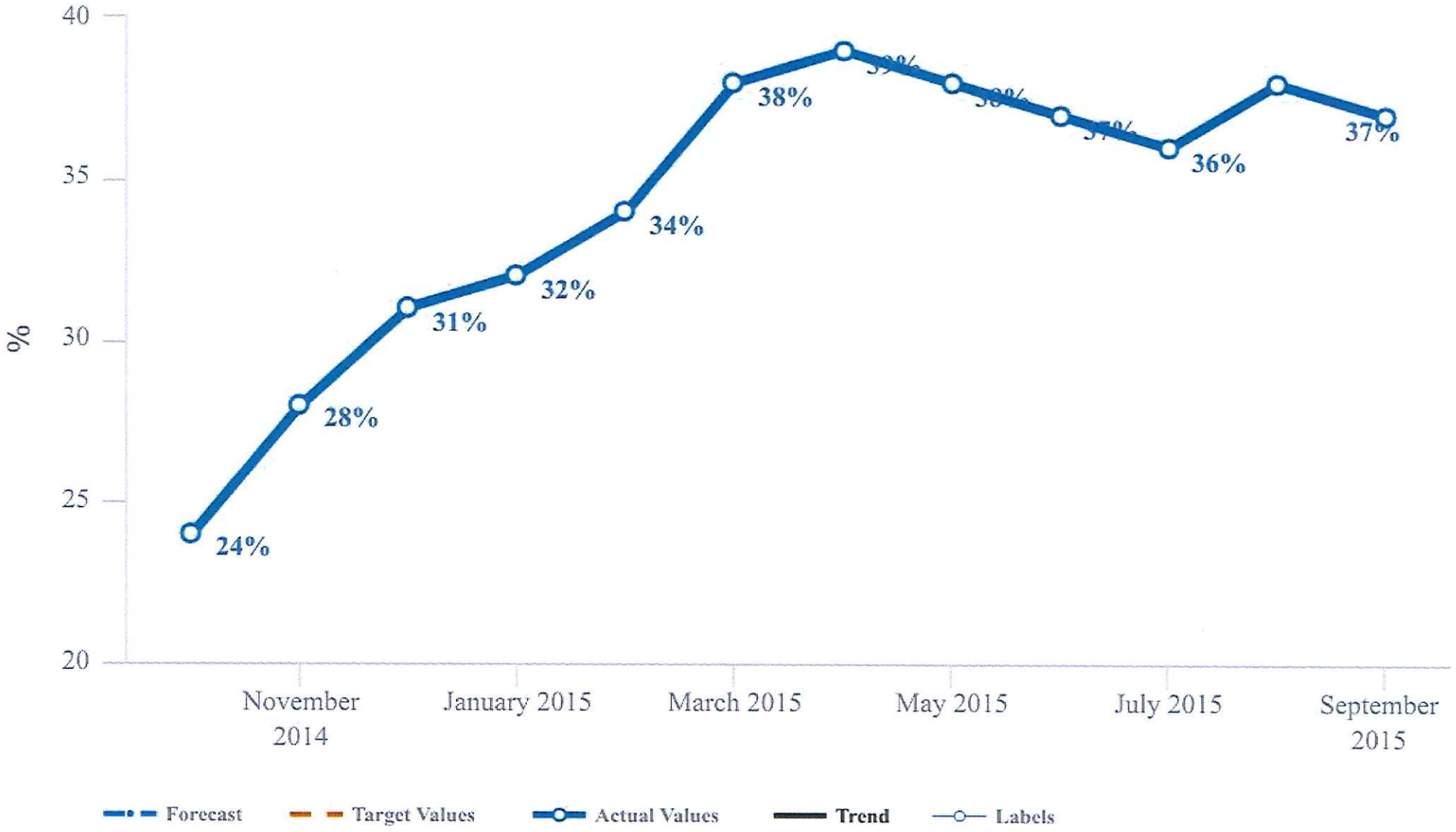
ResultsScorecard.com

Percentage of females enrolled.



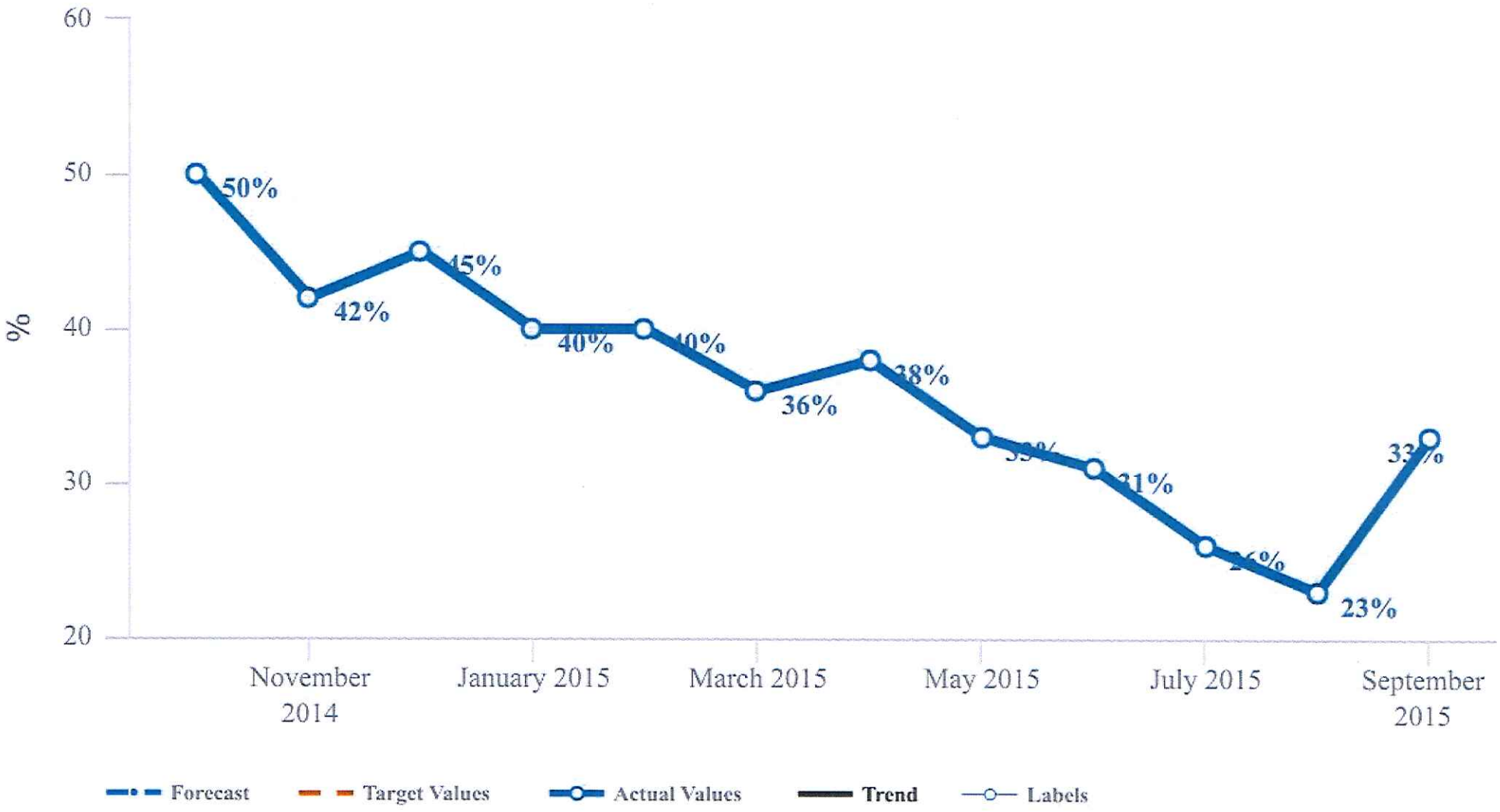
ResultsScorecard.com

Percentage of males enrolled.



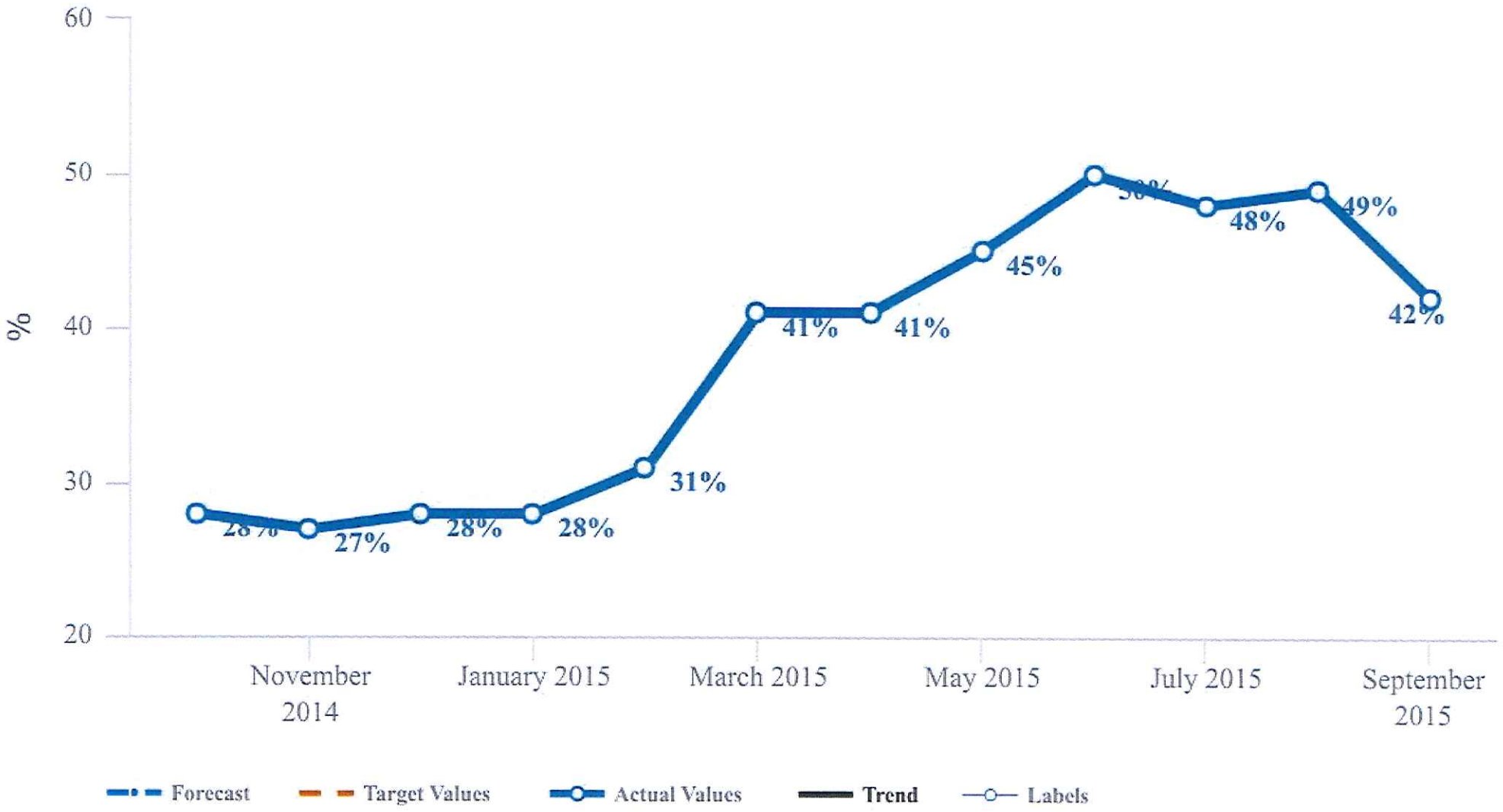
ResultsScorecard.com

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



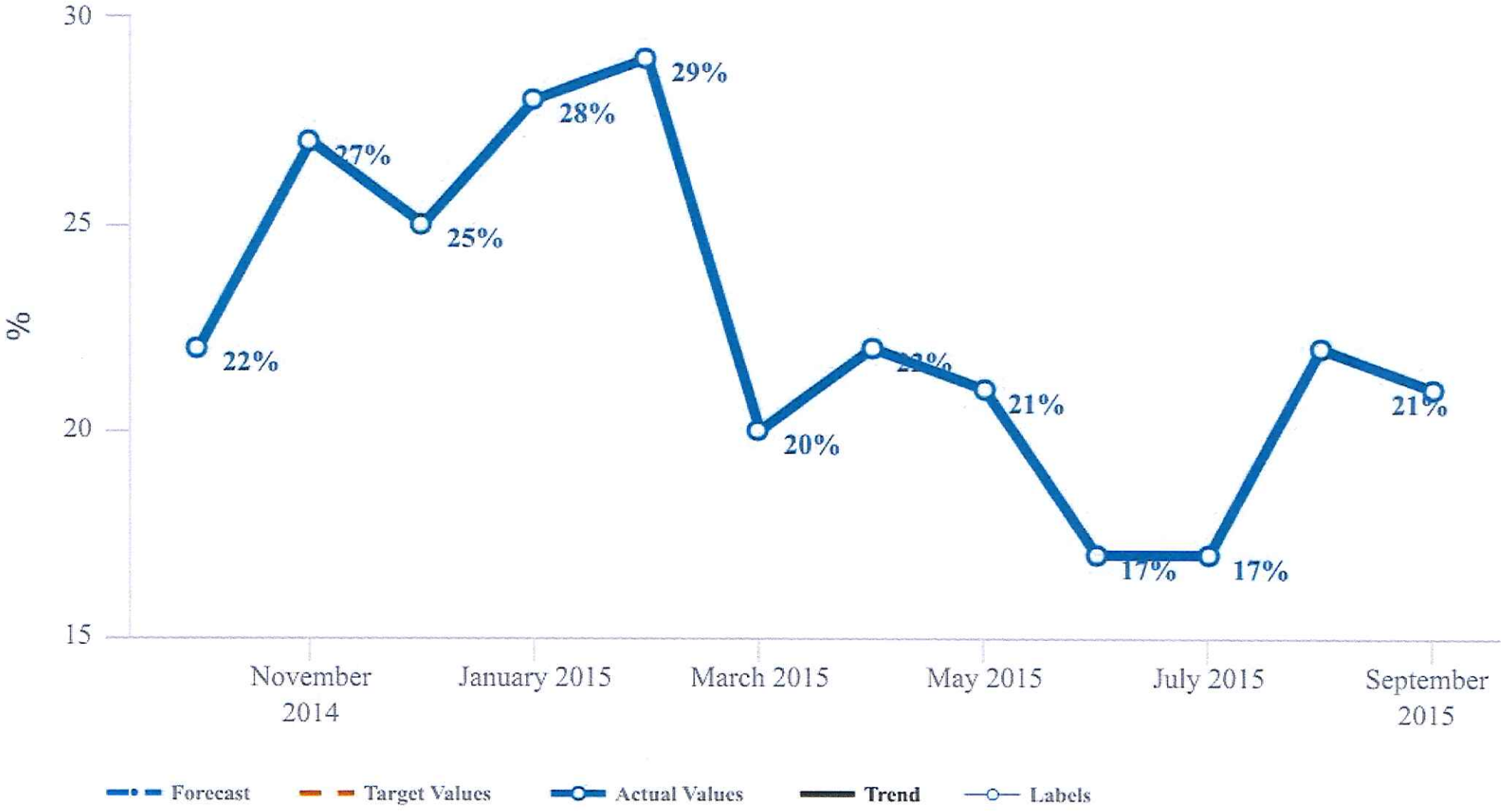
ResultsScorecard.com

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



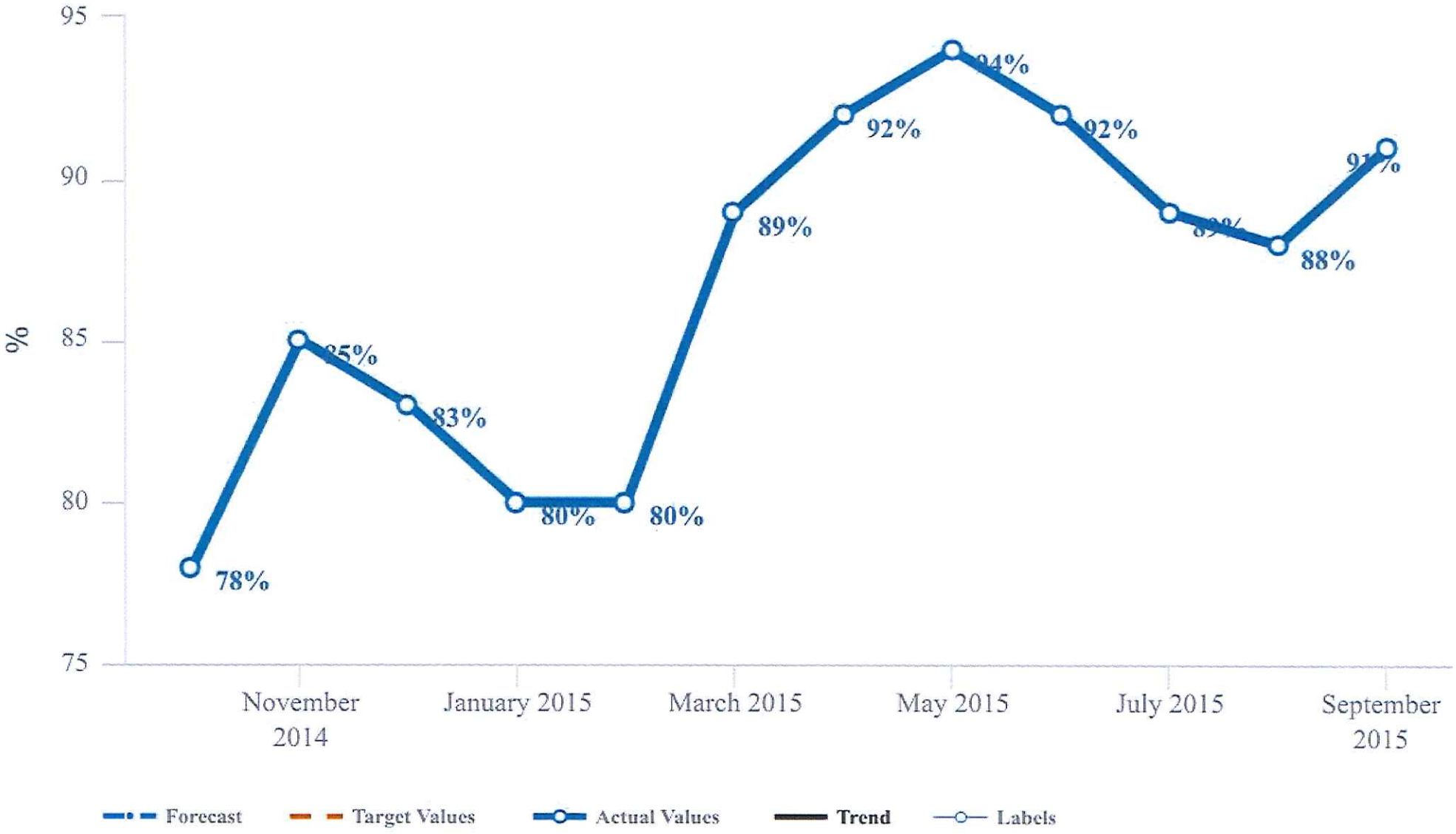
ResultsScorecard.com

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



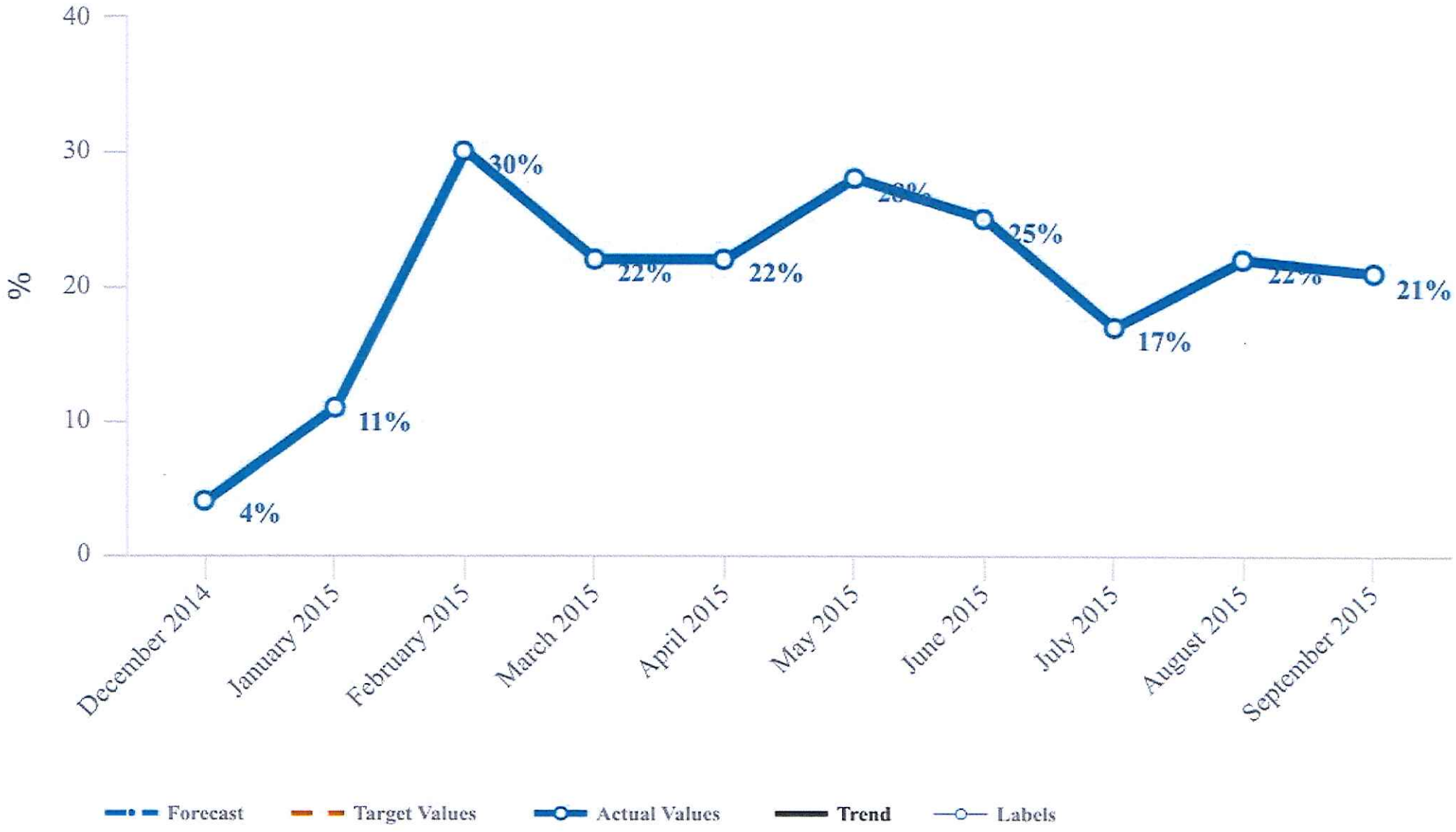
ResultsScorecard.com

Percentage of young adults receiving Medicaid within the last month.

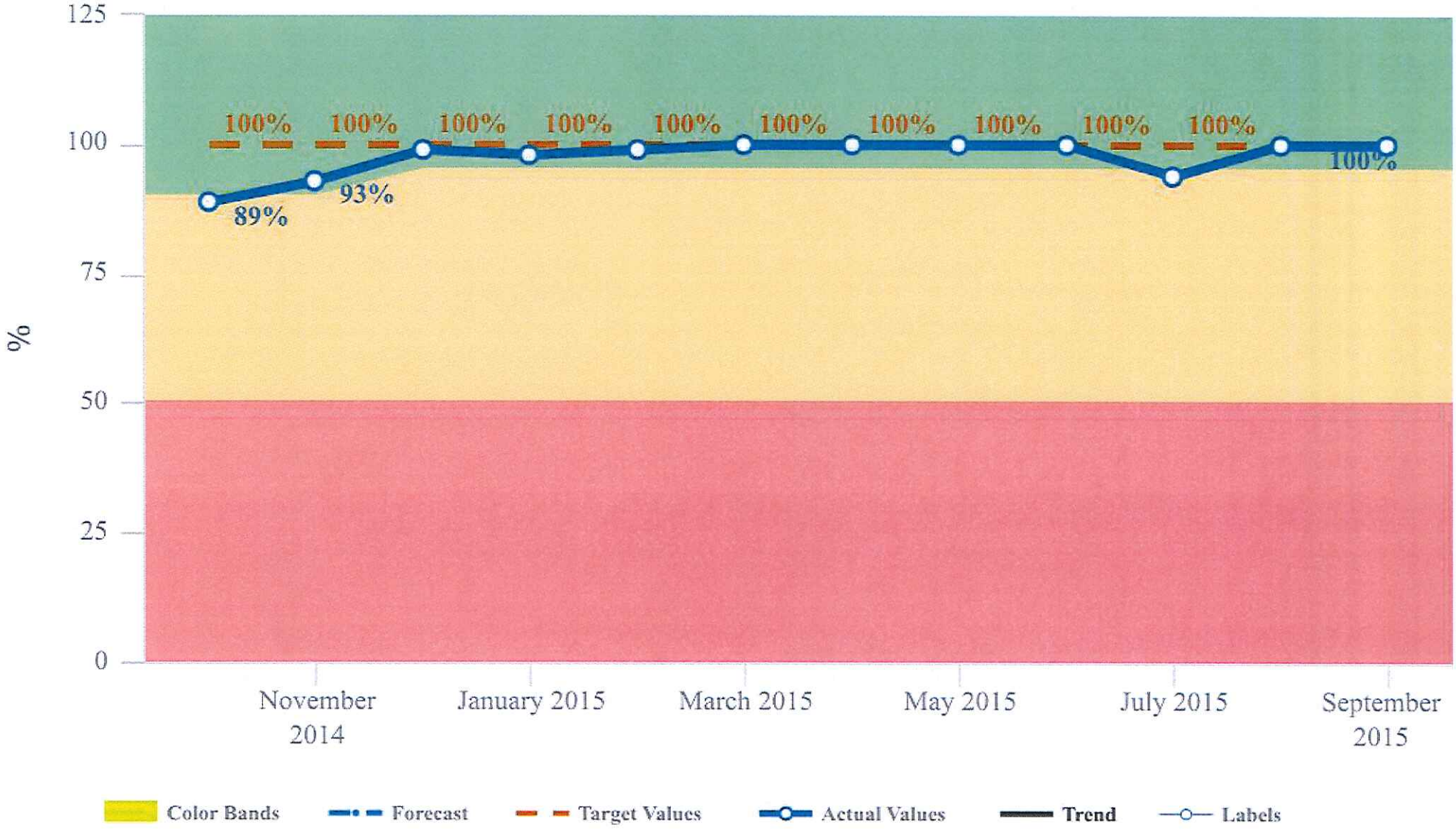


ResultsScorecard.com

Percentage of young adults who are IV-E eligible

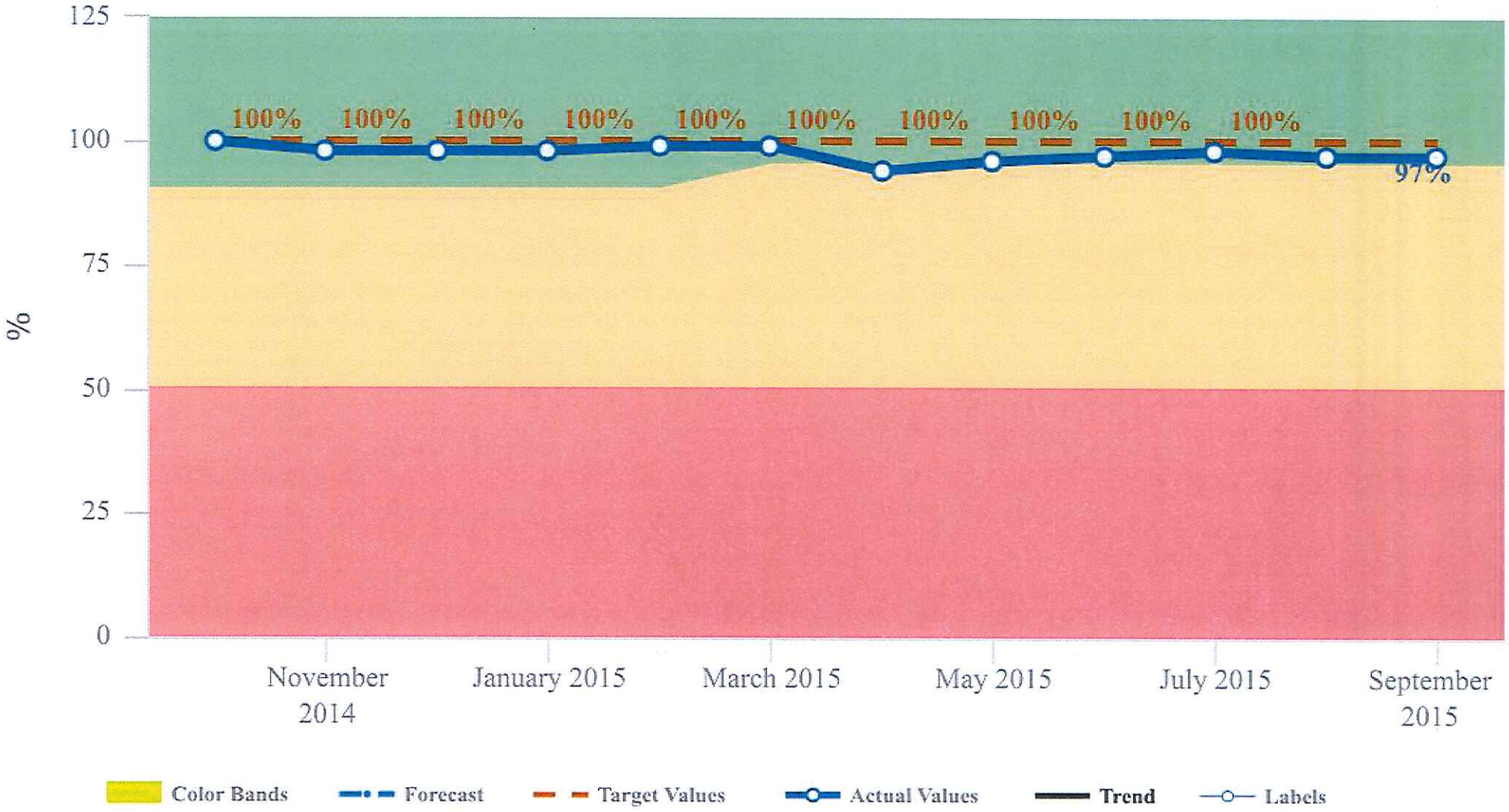


Percentage of young adults who have a Transition Living Plan.



ResultsScorecard.com

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



ResultsScorecard.com

Comments from the Young Adults

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

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

What would you change about the Bridge to Independence program?

The length of time it is for men/women can be involved w/ it.

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

The information, mentor, & what the programs offer

What would you change about the Bridge to Independence program?

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

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

Jackie Landgren

Tina Sondergoth

Human Services Concepts

February 18, 2015

The Bridge to Independence Program

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

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

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

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

Address: 301 Centennial Mall South

P.O. Box 95026

Lincoln, NE 68509

Phone number: 402-471-9331

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Works Cited

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

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

Reported Experiences

- We are working with one youth that did not have a lot of focus or a solid plan for what he wanted to do when he started the B2i program. Since joining the program and receiving the support and guidance from his Independence Coordinator, he has made tremendous progress in his life. This young man was able to work his way through and obtain his GED. He faced some challenges with family members using drugs and not being positive supports for him. After processing through this situation with his IC and others, he was able to step away from those relationships in order to keep focusing on the positive direction of his life. Since then, the Independence Coordinator connected the young man with a new organization, the Bike Union Mentoring Project (BUMP), which combines a coffee shop along with a business that refurbishes and then sells used bicycles. The young man was hired there and has developed a mentoring relationship with the program directors at BUMP. Last week, the IC helped this young man find and obtain his first apartment!

- One Independence Coordinator (IC) has worked with a young lady dealing with very challenging circumstances over the last year. The young lady was on a positive track when she joined the program, attending high school and planned to graduate. She soon got involved with an older man who the IC believed to be taking advantage, manipulating, and mistreating her. Over many months and many conversations, the IC had to remain positive and supportive to the young lady while also expressing the concerns for the young lady's wellbeing that were apparent to the IC. There was a period when the young lady was very resistant, likely due to her "boyfriend's" manipulation, and did not want to continue working with the IC. The IC was able to keep her minimally engaged while continuing to meet the program requirements. Since that low point, the young lady has recognized the negative relationship with her "boyfriend" and called the IC in a time of crisis when trying to leave. The IC helped the young lady move to a different city to live with people who are supportive of her, as well as obtain a protection order. The young lady is now re-enrolled in high school and is looking forward to graduation.

- A Independence Coordinator (IC) was able to help out a young adult with automobile issues. She was having some minor issues with her car and did not know who she could trust to look at her car. The IC knew some contacts that were auto mechanics. They were past HHS/YRTC employees who owned their own automotive business. They were willing to help the young adult with her car.

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

- When the Independence Coordinator (IC) received her first cases, one of the young adults was soon to leave foster care. The young adult had ran from placement and been missing for months with little to no contact. The IC collaborated with the Family Permanency Specialist and identified a phone number for someone that knew the young adult. The IC was able to get a message to the young adult, who then reached out and contacted the IC for information about the Bridge to Independence program. The IC found out that the young man had ran away to New Orleans and planned to stay there indefinitely. The IC was able to engage him over the phone, explain the Bridge to Independence program, and get him interested in participating. Despite past frustrations while a state ward, the young man quickly developed a rapport with the IC and agreed that she could visit him and that he would follow the requirements of the program. Even though he spent his last months in state care as a "runaway", the IC was able to help ensure he was safe and supported as he transitioned to adulthood.

- An Independent Coordinator (IC) is working with a young lady who broke her leg during the weekend of October 3, 2014. Because of the relationship that had been established, the young lady contacted the IC, who helped her with the Emergency Room process and also took her to her follow up appointment. The IC has done a great job building rapport with this young lady and was also able to help this young lady find additional clothing for a job interview and other needed resources in the community.

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) is working with a young lady who lives in her own apartment. The young lady called the IC in tears, saying that she had received a three-day notice to pay her late rent for the month or be evicted from the complex. The young lady did not have the money to pay the rent. The IC was able to calm her down and discuss the situation. The IC helped her to contact the apartment complex to discuss repayment options to prevent the eviction, and also reached out to contacts and community resources that might be able to assist with the late rent payment. The IC was able to connect the young lady with a housing program through a service provider that is specifically focused on helping former state wards. The program agreed to pay the overdue rent as well as accept the young lady into their program, which includes ongoing rental voucher assistance. The IC is working with the young lady to obtain employment and budget for expenses. The Supervisor believes the IC's assistance was essential to preventing

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

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) was trying to assist a young adult to apply for Medicaid. The young adult was having problems applying. The IC took his laptop and met the young adult to help him sign up on-line. This young man now has medical coverage.

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) participated in a meeting with a young man and his grandmother. His grandmother was very upset with the young man and wanted to kick him out of her house because he never cleaned his room. The IC was able to help this young man budget and buy some storage totes and assisted him with organizing his room. The grandmother was very impressed and happy with the help from the IC and is now willing to let her grandson continue to live with her.

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) is working with a young woman in college who currently has approximately $1,500 in debt to multiple places. Prior to joining Bridge to Independence, the young adult had a bank account that she overdrew resulting in overdraft fees. The young woman chose to ignore this instead of repaying it. She was also in debt and past due to her cellular provider, insurance provider for her vehicle, licensing and registration for her vehicle, and had unpaid parking tickets in Nebraska and Colorado. The young adult did not have a clear grasp of how much she owed and to whom. The IC went with the young adult to the bank to discuss the negative balance and develop a plan for repayment. The IC also identified how much the young adult owed for parking tickets and how to go about paying them. The IC worked with the young adult to create a budget for repaying the debt, reestablishing the bank account, and licensing, registering, and insuring her vehicle. By following this budget and using Bridge to Independence funds along with other income, the young adult has been able to begin repaying and cut the debt in half in the month of October. The IC will continue to work on budgeting and money management with this young adult in the future.

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) went to visit with a young adult that had lost her sister and was on her way out of town to go to the funeral with her family. The IC and the young adult sat in her living room, and the IC listened patiently as the young adult let everything out and cried about her feelings with her sister's

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

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) was working with a young lady who had been in need of dental work. When the IC began working with her, the young lady did not have Medicaid or private health insurance. The IC immediately focused on fixing the issue preventing the young lady from receiving Medicaid, and collaborated with representatives in the Medicaid division to get the young lady enrolled. The young lady was able to schedule her needed dental work this week. The IC assisted her in getting to and from the dental procedure, and even went to the grocery store to get her some chicken noodle soup and apple juice to help her recover. The young lady has to return next week for additional dental work, and the IC will be there to support her again. This young adult was very appreciative of the IC's support and assistance during these dental procedures!

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) and a young adult had a follow-up team meeting. At the prior team meeting, there were concerns both at home and at his job site. During the follow-up team meeting, the young adult reported his progress efforts. The job site instructor, the young adult's mother and grandmother all agreed that the young adult had managed an amazing turn around. The young adult was very proud of his accomplishments and additionally reported that he had successfully secured a part time job at a local restaurant. When asked how he turned all of this around, the young adult stated that during the last team meeting he realized that he had a whole team of people believing in him and supporting him and that is why he was able to turn things around for himself.

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) signed a young adult up for Medicaid. The young adult had been struggling with the application process and wanted to give up on getting medical coverage. With the help of the IC, Medicaid is now active for this young adult.

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) was assigned two new cases at once, a husband and wife (and their young child) who were both former wards eligible for Bridge to Independence. The IC scheduled to meet them on a Friday, explain the program requirements, and possibly get them signed up at that time. When the IC arrived at the meeting with the young adults, he found out that their living arrangement with an acquaintance had fallen through and the family was essentially homeless. The family was worried about where they could stay, if they could keep their child safe and warm for the night, and whether their lack of shelter would result in a call to the Abuse and Neglect Hotline. The IC was able to immediately work with the family on a crisis plan for the weekend as well as a plan for the future. Fortunately, one of the young adults had a steady income. The IC was able to calm their concerns and help them find a safe and affordable hotel for the family to stay in for the weekend. The IC ensured that the family had access to food and other essentials for the weekend. The IC worked with the family to contact landlords who offered affordable income-based apartments, and helped the family in visiting and obtaining their own apartment. The IC was able to get the family into the Bridge to Independence program as soon as possible so they could receive the monthly maintenance payments to use toward their own independent housing. The IC was calm and adaptable in responding to this crisis situation, and helped ensure the parents and their child remained safe and warm despite the cold weather.

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) was working with a young lady and her boyfriend in northeastern Nebraska. The young lady had about two months left in her pregnancy before giving birth to the couple's first child. The young woman and her boyfriend were excited about the baby, but also very nervous. The IC had observed that they could use a strong support system and had a lot to learn about parenting, as any young parents would. Their family support system in the area was very limited, and the young woman had come to depend on the IC for support. The IC had been looking for community resources that might be beneficial to the young lady and her boyfriend, and recently found the local Community Action Partnership. The program provided one on one home visits that focused on parenting education and support. The IC reached out to the agency and found they would be eager to work with the young family. The IC was able to connect the Community Action Partnership with the young woman and her boyfriend, and they are now set up to begin working with the partnership. Through the IC's efforts, the parents-to-be were able to strengthen and add to their support network and will learn to be safe and effective parents.

- The Independence Coordinator (IC) worked with a young adult to enroll at Joseph's College of Hair Design, which included: attending the enrollment

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

- One of the young adults gave birth to her first baby boy in October 2015. The Independence Coordinator was able to assist with getting needed items for her from the HOPE CHEST such as; clothing, diapers, a car seat, stroller, bouncer, baby wipes, bottles and blankets. Together, they also found a number of different community resources that she can use in the weeks to come to assist her with her new born baby.

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) formed a relationship and worked with a young lady who got married!!!! This young lady has been an amazing success story and has truly turned her life around. This young lady invited the IC to her wedding reception, and the IC attended. This young lady was overjoyed and hugged the IC and told her "Thank you so much for coming". She went on to tell the IC that her mom missed her wedding because she had passed out (her mom has a very long history of alcoholism). With tears in her eyes she told the IC that she was done letting her mom ruin her life and make her unhappy! She said the best thing that her mom did for her was to make her eligible for the B2i program therefore she was able to meet the IC and have a lifelong support and friend!

- An Independence Coordinator (IC) had been working with a young adult since June 2015, prior to officially enrolling in the B2i program. The young adult consistently reported that he was going to attend Metro Community College for Culinary Arts. The IC met with the young adult on August 24, 2015 and he continued to report the same plan as previously discussed. However, the young adult and the IC checked his enrollment status on a laptop the IC brought. They were not able to log on to his Community College account. The young adult tried to locate his log on information, but was unable to do so. The young adult informed the IC that he could not locate his log on information, so the IC transported the young adult to the Student Services Office at the Community College. The guidance counselor advised the youth that the day was the last day to register for classes. His guidance counselor was able to register the young adult for 12.5 credit hours. The IC then accompanied the youth to the Community College Financial Aid Office and provided necessary documentation for the youth's Pell Grants and financial assistance. The Independence Coordinator was

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

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

Extended Supports for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System in Nebraska

by Katherine Gaughen and Margaret Flynn-Khan

A young person with complex risk and needs may continue to have involvement with the juvenile justice system in Nebraska until he or she reaches the age of majority. Upon reaching the age of nineteen, young people are no longer eligible for the services they received through the juvenile justice system. Nor are there any aftercare services available to these young adults that would help them to successfully transition out of juvenile justice placements or off of probation. Yet, much like their peers in the child welfare system, young people involved in the juvenile justice system depend on the Administrative Office of Probation (AOP) to address the underlying behavioral health, mental health, and factors leading to delinquency.

Efficient and effective service provision is critical for older youth leaving the juvenile or criminal justice system as they attempt to navigate a successful path to a crime-free adulthood.[1] Unfortunately, youth transitioning to adulthood from the juvenile or criminal justice systems face even worse outcomes than their peers from the child welfare system. Within twelve months of their release from institutional placement, only 30 percent of delinquent youth were involved in either school or employment.[2] These youth are significantly more likely than their peers to have substance abuse or mental health problems.[3][4] In some states, almost half return to the justice system after they are released.[5]

As noted in *Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice,* "Youth aging out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems have much in common. They share the negative developmental impact that the trauma they experienced has caused. They also share many of the same challenges, given that their involvement in these systems generally indicates compromised social and family networks, networks that would normally help an adolescent establish pro-social coping mechanisms absent fully developed emotional or cognitive capacities. In many cases, out-of-home placement can exacerbate family and community tensions, making successful social integration as a young adult even more difficult. Sustained family and community relationships are important in providing critical support to a youth as he or she faces the challenges of young adulthood. Allowing youth to age out of either system without working to repair these relationships can inhibit a youth's future success in employment, education, and financial matters."[6]

---

[1] Altschuler, D., Stangler, G., Berkley, K., and Burton, L. (2009). *Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice.* Retrieved on October 19, 2015 from http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/Georgetown%20child%20welfare%20and%20juvenile%20justice.pdf

[2] Bullis, M., Yovanoff, P., Mueller, G., & Havel, E. (2002). Life on the "outs": Examination of the facility-to-community transition of incarcerated adolescents. Exceptional Children, 69, 7–22.

[3] National Mental Health Association. (n.d.). Mental health treatment for youth in the juvenile justice system: A compendium of promising practices. Retrieved October 19, 2015, from https://www.nttac.org/views/docs/jabg/mhcurriculum/mh_mht.pdf.

[4] Reclaiming Futures. (2008). Model policies for juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment. Retrieved October 19, 2015 from https://csgjusticecenter.org/jc/publications/model-policies-for-juvenile-justice-and-substance-abuse-treatment-a-report-by-reclaiming-futures-2/

[5] Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. (2006). Juvenile offenders and victims: 2006 report. Retrieved October 19, 2015, from http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/nr2006/downloads/NR2006.pdf.

[6] Altschuler, D., Stangler, G., Berkley, K., and Burton, L. (2009). *Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice.* Retrieved on October 19, 2015 from http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/Georgetown%20child%20welfare%20and%20juvenile%20justice.pdf

Process for Generating Recommendations

While there is likely a similar level of need between many young people involved in Nebraska's child welfare and juvenile justice systems, the passage of the Bridge to Independence Program (b2i) means that there are very different levels of support available to young people leaving these systems. In order to address these differences, the Bridge to Independence legislation included a provision for the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee to develop specific recommendations for expanding to or improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults not eligible for b2i. To develop recommendations, the Bridge to Independence Committee created a Juvenile Justice Taskforce (see Appendix A for a list of Taskforce Members). Leaders from the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF) and the Children's Commission Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee asked Mainspring Consulting to facilitate the development of recommendations by the Taskforce.

With the support of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Mainspring Consulting facilitated two meetings with members of the Bridge to Independence Juvenile Justice Taskforce and Committee in September and October 2015.

At the September meeting, b2i Juvenile Justice Taskforce members began by reviewing the results of sixteen focus groups conducted by NCCF and Nebraska Voices for Children (for complete focus group results, see Appendix B). Eight focus groups were held with adult participants and included representation from the Through the Eyes of the Child Teams, a collective impact initiative, probation officer teams, the statewide community-based aid planning team, the Office of Juvenile Services Subcommittee and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. Key themes that emerged from adult focus groups included:

- Young people transitioning from the AOP need and deserve extended support;
- Young people are more likely to access a program of extended supports if it is not administered by Probation and the courts. The transition to extended services is important;
- There should be some parameters on eligibility, but those parameters should be flexible enough that youth who need assistance are not categorically excluded;
- Many services are necessary, but especially housing, case management, and life skills; and
- Extended supports should provide a plan and pathway toward transition to full independence, and not continued reliance.

Eight focus groups were also held with 61 young adult participants. Participants ranged in age from 11 to 21 and resided in a variety of placement settings, including biological, guardianship, foster and group homes, shelter care, on their own, residential treatment, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers, and detention. All young adult participants were currently or formerly involved in the juvenile justice system in Nebraska. Key themes that emerged from the young adult focus groups included:

- Recognition regarding the need for extended services, but hesitation about continued probation supervision;
- A strong desire for freedom and the importance of choice in extended supports, while recognizing their own accountability;

- A focus on enhancing existing services rather than creating new service options and connecting young people to those existing services;
- Young adults need time to transition; and
- Messaging is important.

Based on the results of the focus groups, a review of current data from the AOP, and the expertise of committee members, the Taskforce generated an initial set of recommendations. Mainspring consultants then developed fiscal analyses of those options with input from a Steering Committee of the Juvenile Justice Taskforce. The fiscal analyses were shared with the Juvenile Justice Taskforce and members of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee in October. After reviewing those analyses and discussing the goals of extended supports and services for the juvenile justice population, the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee and Juvenile Justice Taskforce agreed to put forth the following recommendations.

Recommendations

Members of the Taskforce and Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee articulated the results they want to achieve through their recommendations as a guide to their discussions and the consideration of their recommendations.

Members agreed that the primary result they want their recommendations to achieve is that **young people who are involved with juvenile justice in Nebraska can make a successful transition to adulthood**. The benefits of vulnerable young people making a successful transition to adulthood are realized in the individual lives of youth as well as in society as a whole, as increased health and well-being, education and earnings, and stable family connections for young people can mean reduced adult criminal justice involvement and reduced use of public assistance benefits.

To achieve this result, members of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee and Juvenile Justice Taskforce put forward the following recommendation:

Young people under the jurisdiction of the AOP and 3B wards under the jurisdiction of DHHS who are in out-of-home placement on their 19th birthday should be able to voluntarily opt into Bridge to Independence between ages 19-21 if it is determined that it is in their best interest to do so, due to a lack of alternative supports.

The Taskforce agreed it was important to build on the success of b2i and felt that certain vulnerable young adults exiting the juvenile justice system require the same level of support as young people exiting the child welfare system. Specifically, the taskforce wanted to ensure that young adults who lack family supports and as a result have no place to go upon exit from juvenile justice out-of-home placements, are able to enter the b2i program. The group agreed that if legislation and implementation of this recommendation moves forward, further work would need to be done to delineate the specific criteria for determining which young people lack support and who would make that determination.

One benefit of allowing young people to voluntarily sign themselves into b2i is that the state could determine eligibility for Title IV-E funding, maximizing federal dollars available to support these young people. Nonetheless, expanding the b2i program to this additional population of young people to opt into b2i would require a fiscal allocation from the legislature. Please see Appendix C for the fiscal analysis of this recommendation.

In generating the above recommendation, the Taskforce and Committee seriously considered making the recommendation that the b2i age of eligibility should be lowered to 18 so that both eligible young people in DHHS care and those in out-of-home JJ placements could ender b2i at 18. A variety of legal challenges and programmatic concerns led the group to limit the recommendation to adding the 19 – 21 year old juvenile justice population to b2i at this time. However, taskforce members wanted to highlight the limitations of this recommendation and stress that it is important to begin exploring how to address barriers and decrease the age of eligibility for b2i from 19 to 18.

Important concerns with eligibility for b2i beginning at age 19 include the following:

- Young people are routinely discharged from DHHS custody to independent living at age 18. These young people fall into a gap in services now, as they are not eligible to enter b2i until age 19;
- Taskforce members were concerned that beginning eligibility at age 19 for juvenile justice youth could lead judges to extend juvenile justice involvement for young people when it is not warranted, in order for them to access the services at age 19; and
- The b2i program has a very low IV-E penetration rate, meaning that most young people are ineligible for IV-E when they enter b2i because of employment earnings. As a result, Nebraska does not get federal matching funds for these individuals. If young people can enter b2i at age 18, as is the policy in all other states that have extended foster care, they will have had less time to progress in employment after high school and will be more likely to be income eligible for IV-E. Once young people enter the program, there is no requirement to redetermine IV-E eligibility.

Despite the above concerns with eligibility for b2i beginning at age 19, the fact that the age of majority is 19 in Nebraska made participants concerned that signing a voluntary placement agreement to enter b2i would not be a legal option for young adults at age 18. Nebraska must work through several challenges related to the current age of majority before pursuing b2i eligibility at age 18:

- Determine who can sign a young person into b2i prior to age 19:
    - If only the parents can voluntarily sign young people into b2i before age 19, determine whether checks for direct stipends must go to parents or can be directed to young people;
    - If only the parents can voluntarily sign young people into b2i before age 19, determine whether IV-E eligibility is determined based on the parents' or the young persons' income; and
    - If only parents can voluntarily sign young people into b2i before age 19, determine whether young people have the right to opt out of b2i without parental consent. Can parents sign young people out of b2i against the young adult's wishes?
- Create a training plan to ensure both the judicial system and case managers and/or probation officers are using best practice in determining which young people should remain in care until age 19 and which might benefit from entering the voluntary b2i at age 18.

Future Considerations

Recognizing that many young people in the juvenile justice system may not need the level of support offered by b2i, but do need guidance from caring adults and connections to community resources, the group also considered Nebraska's existing infrastructure to support young adults in transition. After reviewing the existing PALS and Central Navigator programs, the taskforce agreed there was merit to expanding these programs to serve young people transitioning from the juvenile justice system, but did not recommend moving forward with such an expansion at this time. In the future, the taskforce recommended carefully reviewing the following options for implementation:

1. **Young people under the jurisdiction of the AOP and 3B wards under the jurisdiction of DHHS who are in out-of-home placement at age 18 should be able to voluntarily receive case management services until they reach age 21.**

   Taskforce members believed strongly that young people in juvenile justice out-of-home placements could benefit from intensive case management services and access to a small amount of flexible, needs-based funds focused on helping them achieve self-sufficiency. The Nebraska's PALS model and needs-based funds offer an existing model and infrastructure that are currently limited to serving young people in the child welfare system who are transitioning from care, but could be built upon to serve young people in out-of-home placements under juvenile justice jurisdiction.

2. **All young people who receive support and services from the AOP at age 18 can access services from a central navigator until they reach age 21.**

   Nebraska currently operates a Central Navigator Access system for young people transitioning out of the child welfare system that could be utilized to serve youth exiting juvenile justice. It is designed to ensure that young people can have access to needed supports and services in an effective and timely manner through a systematic approach of collaborative partnerships intended to promote a continuum of care. The system utilizes a youth-centered approach and identifies the range of supports and services available in communities to make efficient and targeted referrals for young people. Nebraska could expand eligibility for this low-cost, low intensity model to young people who have been involved with juvenile justice at age 18 in order to help them access essential supports as they transition to adulthood.

Appendix A

Membership Roster
Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force

Task Force Co-Chairs: Jeanne Brandner, Office of Probation and Juliet Summers, Voices for Children

Task Force Members:
Deanna Brakhage, Nebraska Dept. of Health and Human Services
Shannon Brower, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities
Becca Brune, Nebraska Appleseed
Nathan Busch, Nebraska Dept. of Health and Human Services
Ralene Cheng, Office of Probation
Jason Feldhaus, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Brandy Gustoff, Omaha Home for Boys
Sarah Helvey, Nebraska Appleseed
Christine Henningsen, Center for Children, Families and the Law
Doug Lenz, Central Plains Center for Services
Katie McLeese Stephenson, Court Improvemehnt Project
Mary Jo Pankoke, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Doug Peters, Nebraska Dept. of Health and Human Services
Cassy Rockwell, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Kelli Schadwinkel, Office of Probation
Shayne Schiermeister, Nebraska Dept. of Health and Human Services
Jill Schubauer, Region 3 Behavioral Health
Megann Schweitzer, Nebraska Dept. of Health and Human Services
Jennifer Skala, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Lana Verbrigghe, Child Savings Institute

Appendix B

Stakeholder Perspectives on Extended Supports and Services for Juvenile Justice Alumni

Prepared for the Juvenile Justice Extension Taskforce of the Nebraska Children's Commission's Young Adult Supports and Services Sub-Committee

This report captures feedback gathered from sixty-two young adults with current or former involvement in the Nebraska Juvenile Justice system and forty-four professionals working within the system concerning the creation of a supports and services program for young adults, ages 19 and 20, leaving the juvenile justice system without adequate natural or community connections. Ideas concerning components of the program, fears about its implementation, and needs of young adults with this experience are presented.

9/17/2015

Table of Content

Introduction

In an effort to explore the need and potential structure of a supports and services program for 19 and 20 year old young adults with juvenile justice system involvement and minimal natural supports, the Young Adult Services and Supports subcommittee of the Children's Commission, in partnership with the Nebraska Probation Administration, plans to convene a group of stakeholders in September and October 2015. Stakeholders will be asked to explore three questions, including:

1. If such services and supports are needed.
2. If so, how they should be structured, provided, and what oversight is needed.
3. If so, what would it cost? (Analysis provided by Mainspring Consulting)

In preparation for these meetings, a workgroup was created to gather feedback from young adults with juvenile justice experience and adult stakeholders (i.e. service providers, administrators, family members, judicial professionals, and other interested community members). The focus groups would focus on gathering feedback on the first two questions being explored. The workgroup consisted of representatives from Nebraska Probation Administration, Nebraska Children, Voices for Children, and the University of Nebraska's Center for Children, Families and the Law. The group determined focus groups would provide the best method of information gathering. Representatives of these organizations collaborated in the planning, development, facilitation, and compilation of focus group materials. Additional support was provided by Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative and Mainspring Consulting.

This report offers a synthesis of the results of all focus groups held, including process, demographic information, key themes, discussion and next steps. Copies of all materials used during the focus groups are provided in the appendices.

Process

Sixteen focus groups were held across Nebraska in total; eight with youth and eight with adult stakeholders. Sixty-two youth and forty-two adults participated. Youth participants ranged from age 11 to 21 and resided in a variety of placements covering a majority of the continuum of placement options (including: biological, guardianship, foster and group homes, shelter care, on their own, residential treatment, and detention). All young adults participating were currently or formerly involved in the juvenile justice system in Nebraska. Adult participants served in a variety of system roles including diversion, services providers, detention or YRTC staff, judges, attorneys, shelter staff, foster parent providers, advocates, community service staff, domestic violence services, system administration, oversight agencies, and researchers.

Given the short timetable for gathering feedback, focus group locations were identified by the planning workgroup with the hopes of gathering voice from youth and professionals with experience in various juvenile justice placement and service options from across the state. Identified sites were contacted by a member of the planning team via email or phone. Logistical arrangements were then made with those able to hold a group within the given timeframe. All youth focus groups were held in person. Of the adult groups, five were held in person and three by conference call. All entities allowing a focus group to be held with their members or young consumers are listed below.

Focus Group Entities and Locations	
Adult Focus Group Entities	District 1 and 3 Through the Eyes of the Child Teams (SE Nebraska & Lincoln) Operation Youth Success (Omaha) District 3 and 4 Probation Officer Teams (Lincoln and Omaha) Community-based Aid Planning Team Members (Statewide representation) Children's Commission's Juvenile Services Subcommittee (Statewide representation)

	Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice (Statewide Representation)
Youth Focus Group Entities	Boystown Campus (Omaha) Boystown Shelter (Grand Island) Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (Geneva and Kearney) ReConnect for Success (Omaha) Project Everlast (North Platte) Scottsbluff County Detention (Gering) Juvenile Justice League (Omaha)

Planning team members facilitated each of the groups with the exception of the Project Everlast-North Platte group, which was facilitated by the youth group's advisor. Participants completed an assent form, demographic sheet, and focus group questions. An explanation of the purpose and process discussion and an opportunity for questions was given. Following an icebreaker question, questions, specific to the development of a young adult support and services system for disconnected young adults leaving probation services, were asked. Questions were tailored for youth and adult feedback. Questions for both groups are listed below.

Focus Group Questions	
Ice-Breaker Question	What Probation services or support do you think is most important?
Adult Questions	Do you think Nebraska should allow extended court jurisdiction and/or probation oversight on a voluntary basis beyond age 19 where continued treatment and services are needed and agreed to? ▪ What do you see as pros and cons of this policy? In some cases, youth who are in out of home placement due to juvenile justice involvement do not have a home to return to. Would you be in favor of policy changes allowing these young adults to voluntarily enter the Bridge to Independence program if it was documented that they do not have a home to return to? ▪ If not Bridge to Independence, do you believe Probation should develop and administer a similar set of services for youth who do not have a home to return to? For the broader population of youth under probation oversight, do you believe it is important to offer extended supports and services at age after a youth turns 19? Why or why not? If yes, what types of services do you see as most important to offer? Who should be the main referral source and provide the case management for extended services?
Youth Questions	Right now, in Nebraska, court jurisdiction and probation stops at age 19 in juvenile cases. If you had the option to continue your probation case, at age 19, as a way to continue to get services, would you want to? ▪ Why or why not? Are there services that probation is providing that you would want to continue? If special services were provided to youth who had been involved with juvenile justice after they 19, what types of services are most important? ▪ Would you opt to keep your probation case open if that was the only way to continue

	receiving those services? If services after 19 were available, would you want your current probation officer as your main contact? ▪ Why or why not? Is there anything else you want to share?

Notes were taken by a workgroup member or staff on-site with each of the focus group locations. Information from each type of group (youth and adult) were consolidated and condensed into overarching themes by a member of the workgroup and shared with the rest of the team for feedback. Themes are outlined in the following two sections. Specific responses are not provided due to a commitment to participants that responses would remain anonymous and only themes would be captured in the report.

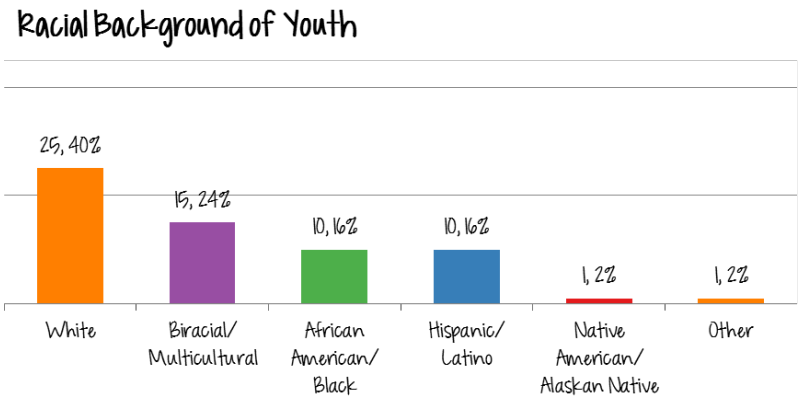
Results: Demographics

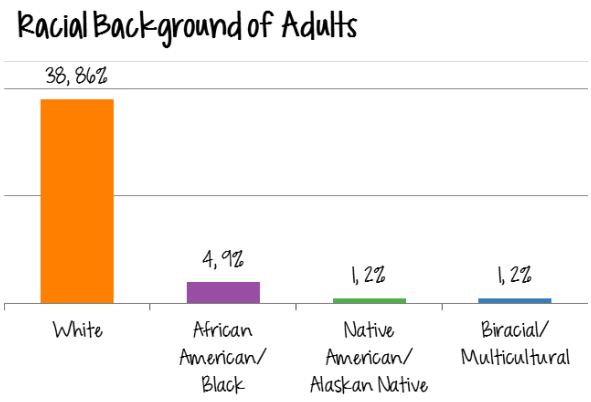
Information was collected via feedback forms from a total of 62 youth and 44 adult focus group participants. Participants were from and/or worked in various locations across Nebraska, although the majority lived or worked in Lincoln/Lancaster County and Omaha/Douglas/Sarpy Counties. Youth participants tended to be more diverse in terms of gender, racial background, and ethnicity than adult participants, who were primarily female (77%) and white (86%). No adult participants reported their ethnicity as Latino/Hispanic, although data was missing for one adult.

Basic Youth Information

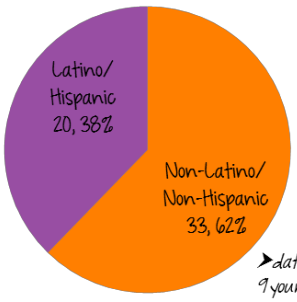
Young People's Towns			
Omaha	22	Chicago	1
Lincoln	10	Columbus	1
North Platte	7	Elm Creek	1
Grand Island	4	Fremont	1
Ames	2	McCook	1
Broken Bow	2	Michoacan, Mexico	1
Hastings	2	Oxford	1
Kearney	2	Palisade	1
Lexington	2		

Adult's City/County/District			
Lancaster County	14	Geneva/Fillmore	1
Douglas County	7	Region 3 area	1
Gage County	2	Kearney/ Buffalo /Dist. 9	1
Lincoln	2	North Platte	1
Statewide	2	Lancaster Co. & 13 rural Co	1
17 Western & Central Co.	1	Omaha	1
Buffalo County	1	Grand Island/Hall & Howard Co.	1
Cass County	1	Sarpy County	1
District 1	1	Sarpy/Otoe/Cass Co.	1
Douglas/Sarpy Co.	1	Winnebago/ Thurston Co.	1



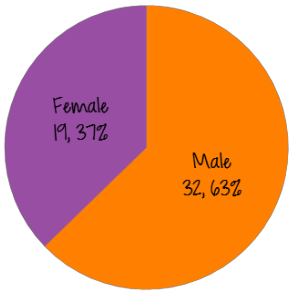


Ethnicity of Youth



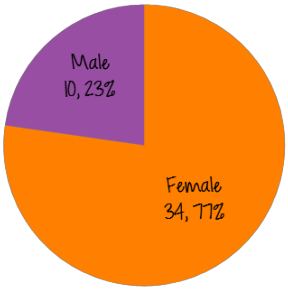
➤data were missing for 9 young people

Gender of Youth

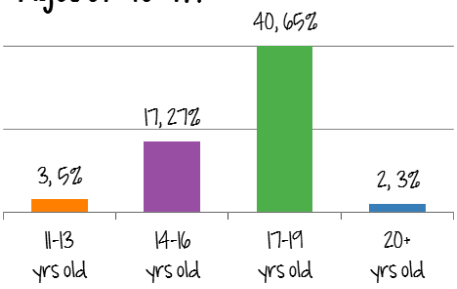


➤data were missing for 11 young people

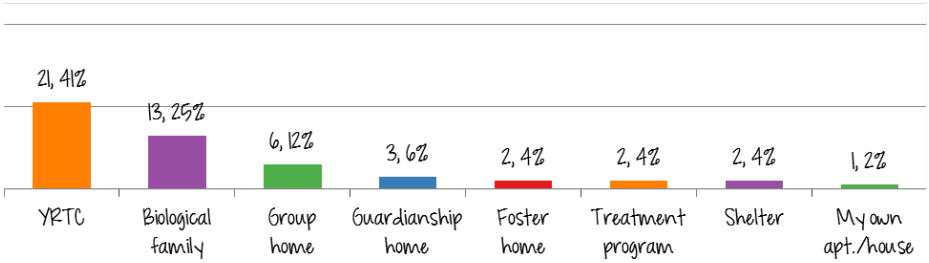
Gender of Adults



Ages of Youth



Current Living Situation of Youth



➤data were missing for 11 young people; 1 young person selected multiple options

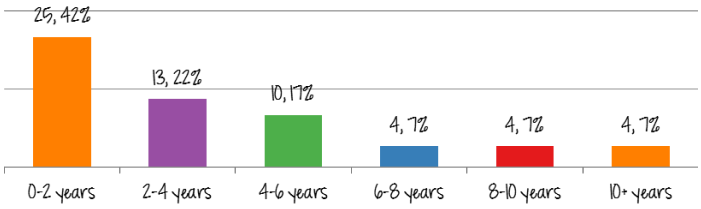
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH JUVENILE JUSTICE

Most youth who completed a feedback form had been in the juvenile justice system for less than two years (42%), although a handful had been involved for 10 or more years (7%).

When looking at how long adult participants had been working either in juvenile justice or with at-risk youth, the length of time was much longer, with over 50% having spent 11 or more years with this population.

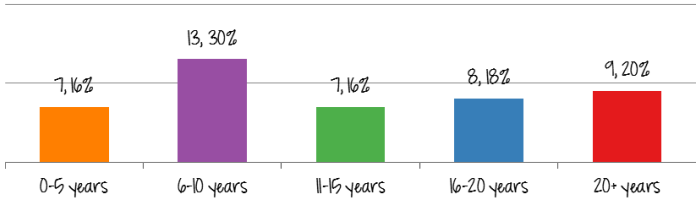
The majority of adults identified as probation officers (32%) or fell into the "other" category (32%). "Other" responses most commonly included different types of service providers and other child welfare roles, such as foster parent, CASA volunteer, FCRO staff, etc.

Length of Time Youth were in Juvenile Justice System

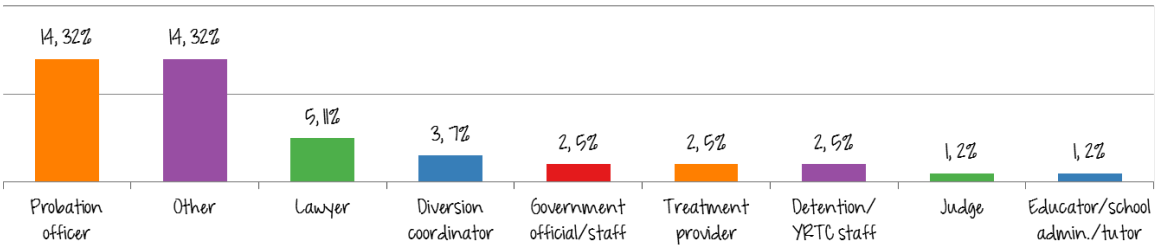


➤data were missing for 2 young people

Length of Time Adults have Worked with at-Risk Youth



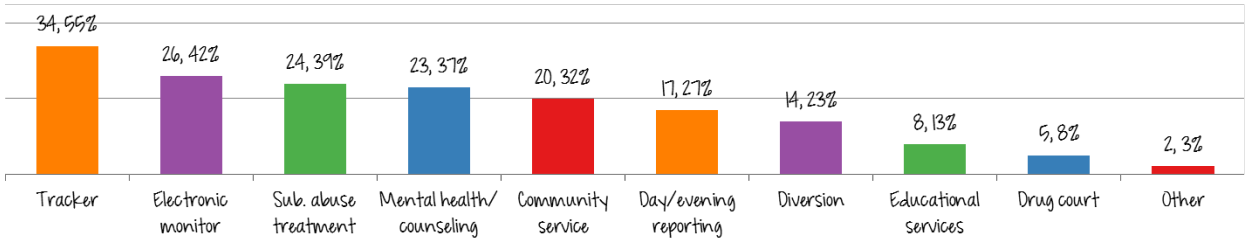
Adults' Primary Role with Youth on Probation



The most common probation services youth reported receiving included working with a tracker (55%), wearing an electronic monitor (42%), or participating in substance abuse treatment (39%), mental health counseling (37%), or community service (32%). The adult group most frequently reported providing mental health/counseling services (32%), educational services (27%), day/evening reporting services (25%), and tracking services (25%).

Involvement with Probation Services: Youth

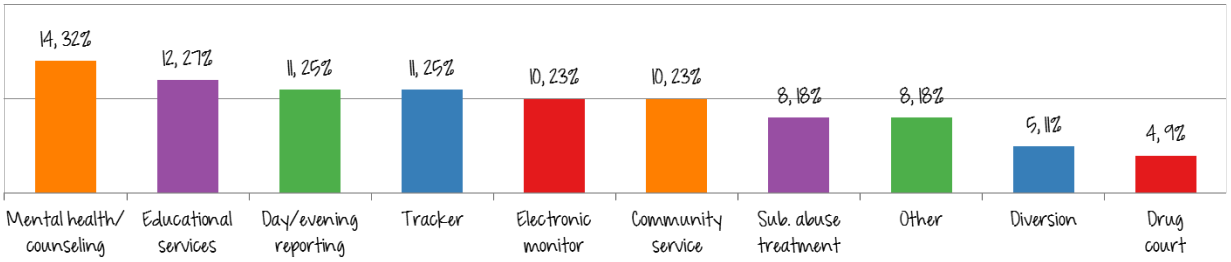
Note: young people were asked to select all services that applied



➤data were missing for 3 young people; 2 young people didn't know; and 1 young person responded with "none"

Type of Probation Services Provided by Adults

Note: participants were asked to select all services that applied



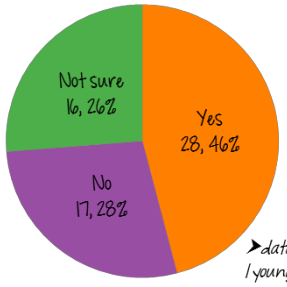
➤16 participants did not respond to this question

EXTENDING VOLUNTARY SERVICES PAST AGE 19

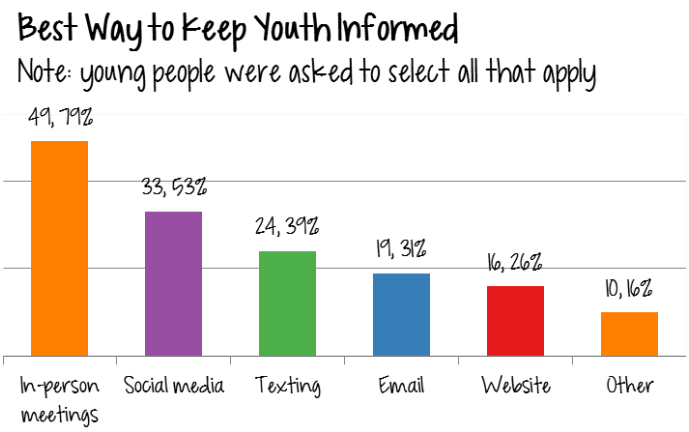
When asked whether probation should offer voluntary services for youth after the age of 19, just under half of youth participants responded in agreement (46%). The remainder either disagreed (28%) or were uncertain (26%).

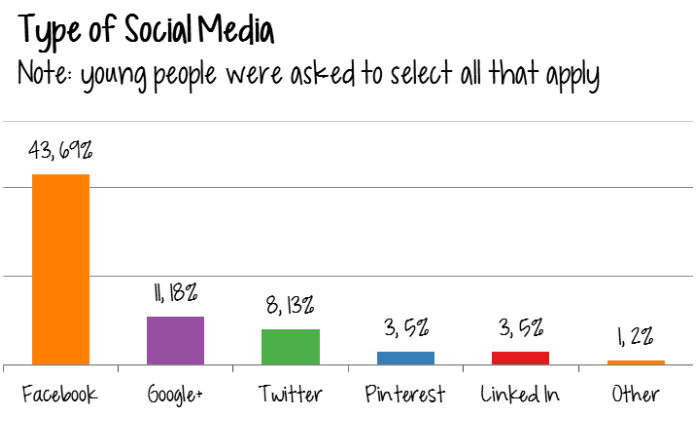
When asked about the best methods of keeping young people up-to-date on these potential extended services, youth vastly preferred in-person meetings (79%). Social media was the second most common response (53%), with the most common preferred type of social media being Facebook (69%).

Youth Perspective on Extended Services

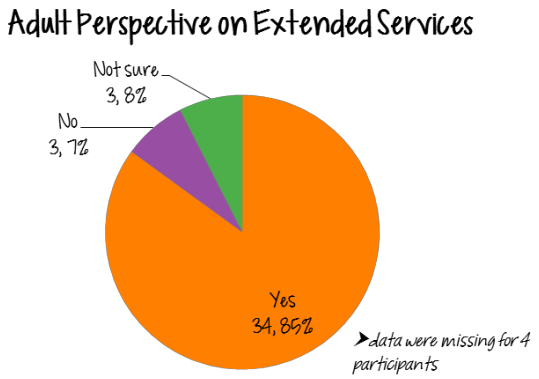


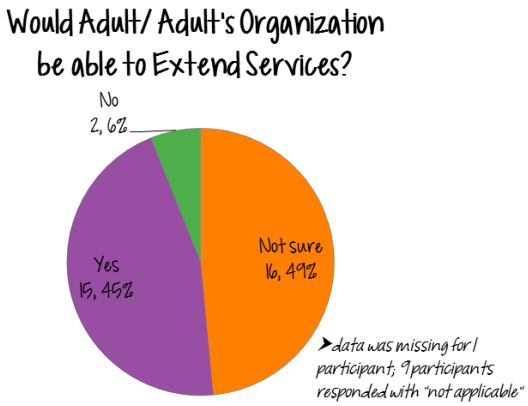
➤data was missing for 1 young person





Alternatively, the adult group was much more in favor of offering voluntary services for probation-involved youth after the age of 19 (85%). Only a handful either disagreed (7%) or weren't sure (8%). When asked whether they – or their organization – would be able to extend their own work to include this population, most adult participants who responded were unsure (49%), although very few immediately indicated that this would not be possible (6%).





Results: Young Adult Themes

Overall, young adult participants expressed a great deal of query about the specifics of an extended supports and services program. This hesitation was evident in their responses. Facilitators reinforced that the program was only in a contemplation phase and that the focus groups were aimed at providing them with the opportunity to help decide if such a program was necessary and, if so, how it should operate. With this guidance, young people provided many items to consider and suggestions. These have been categorized into nine areas which are discussed below.

Hesitation about Continued Probation Supervision

The desire to be "done" with the system provided the biggest barrier to youth wanting an extended supports and services program. Many participants tempered their answer about extending probation involvement due to fear and uncertainty of what the program would require and restrict. Youth were worried about the stigma attached to being on probation. Some expressed a desire to open a new docket, so that their probation docket could be closed and sealed. This included worry about having to keep a probation case open until someone turned 19 in order to access the services and having to continue attending court. Youth indicated they would like the program to be run more casually than traditional court. They wanted the judge to be involved to "make it official", yet avoid as much of the formalities of court as possible. They also wanted the option of keeping their attorney.

Young adults were very concerned about trading freedom for access to services. The recognition of turning 19 and becoming a legal adult provided them a new set of rights and abilities appeared important to youth. Few participants shared a willing to sacrifice any of these adult rights for greater access to services. Some youth voiced wanting services on an "as needed" basis, rather than being required to be in a program. Youth in every group expressed feeling as though they had already been in the system too long and just wanted to be "done with it". They shared wanting to rid themselves of the "label" of probation and "get out of the services."

Importance of Choice

A strong desire for the program to be completely voluntary was echoed among all groups. This further supports the theme of desire for freedom and the power of choice that separates being a minor and legal adulthood. Some youth acknowledged that other young people may need such a program; however, it "wasn't for me". Those supporting the creation of such a program often spoke about the need for the young adults involved to have a say in the services provided them, the people supporting them, and the development of any personal plans or goals. Clearly, the wish for voice was central to many participants.

Recognition of Need

Young adults recognized that supportive services are important and needed by some people. A number shared an awareness of being unprepared for the "reality of life" and wanted help with life skills, ranging from basic daily skills like cooking to grander abilities such as job, housing, and college access. Other youth acknowledged a need for young adults to complete services, such as substance abuse and mental health treatment, in progress at the time of their nineteenth birthday or release from Probation services. Some youth felt an extended supports and services program could help anytime a probation case was closed or be included in all re-entry plans, especially after leaving a restrictive placement, like YRTC. It appeared there was a general openness to such a program being created.

Services Needed

Youth identified a number of services received while probation-involved that they would like to see expanded and others that should be offered specifically to young adults age 19 and 20. Interestingly, there was a fair amount of disagreement about the helpfulness or necessity of some services. In fact, some youth strongly disagreed with the inclusion of certain services, for example drug tests, random visits, and check-ins. Quite intense discussions occurred out services linked to accountability, like caseworker or drug testing. Some youth strongly desired having someone or some way of being "checked on", while others wanted absolute freedom to make their own choices. Services discussed are outlined below.

Desired Services and Supports		
Type of Service	*Offered while Probation-Involved*	*Available via Extension Program*
Treatment	Substance Abuse Counseling Urine Analysis/Drug Tests	Counseling Drug and Alcohol Treatment Urine Analysis/Drug Testing
Life Skills	Pregnancy/Parenting Practice with daily living skills Financial Literacy	Moving Housing Reading a Lease Renter's Rights Pregnancy/Parenting Cooking Independent Living How to Buy Groceries Budgeting/How to Pay Bills

		Getting State ID and other documents such as birth certificate
Social	Connection to Social/Fun/Community/Civic Engagement Groups	Fun, Positive Social Groups Help finding new social groups-someone to connect them to positive friends
Coaching/Personal Support	Day Reporting Someone to "check in"	Service Navigation One-stop shop organization Help Accessing Other Services & Systems (food stamps, vocational rehabilitation, disability, etc.) Someone to Check-in/Call for Help Guidance
Employment & Education	Job Skills Resume Creation/Building How to Search for Jobs	Career/Education Resources Help Job and College Searching Education Services and Scholarships Employment Skills and Search Summer Housing while in College
Other	Medicaid Thinking for a Change Car/Transportation	Transportation Medical Coverage Utility Assistance Car Programs including how to get insurance, registration

Enhancement of Existing Services

Recognition of the availability of services in other state systems and communities existed, yet youth acknowledged that they were not always known or easily accessed by young adults. One group shared feeling probation officers are not very well connected with community services and felt diversion officers had a better understanding of available supports. It seemed as though young people sought some person or way to learn about and connect to these services while still involved with Probation. Some youth expressed feelings that an extended services and supports program would not be needed, if youth had greater access to programs and skill development while involved with Probation. Another group discussed wanting help connecting to job, social service, treatment, and parenting offered rather than creating a separate program or system. One youth exemplified this by stating, "This should be more social services, instead of juvenile justice."

Time to Transition

A smoother transition from system involvement to adulthood was discussed by many of the groups via talk about the lack of aftercare, feelings of institutionalization and specific references to transition programs. The need for more training related to and practice with life skills was a topic among every group and made up a majority of the services suggested. More opportunities to learn life skills while involved with probation, verses having things done for them was proposed as a way to help ease young adults need for such a program. Feelings of institutionalization and disempowerment were expressed in each group. Some youth connected these feelings to a hesitation of older youth wanting to be involved in an extended program.

Seeking Connection

A want for someone to "check in" on them and hold them accountable was shared in multiple groups. The desire for people who cared, listened, understood, and were dependable provided the most common response to the question about who should be the main contact for services. Feelings about probation

officers serving as the primary contact were mixed. In one group, almost all of the youth indicated that their probation officer had been a support for them, noting their appreciation of the probation officers interest in their lives and support for reaching their goals. Some youth also shared wanted to avoid having to build another new relationship. Other youth worried that probation officers' caseloads are too large to allow them to continue to serve youth in an extended program.

Other young people disagreed with having probation officers serve as the primary support for an extended services program. They expressed a desire for someone completely separate from the probation system, even funded by a different source, and of the youth's choosing. Regardless of the support person, youth didn't want to be judged or looked down upon by the person(s) supporting them. Many youth expressed wanting someone to provide advice, encouragement, and unconditional support for them, even though they frequently disagreed with whom that person should be. Youth identified possible alternative support people and specific traits they wanted in a support person. These are outlined below.

Case Management Suggestions	
Alternative Support People	*Support Person Traits*
Mentor of the Youth's Choosing	Understand the program and services available
Drug & Alcohol Counselor	Nice/Kind/Supportive
Youth Counselor (like those at YRTC)	Respectful
Alumni of Juvenile Justice System	Understanding
Volunteer	Honest
Older with More Life Experience	Listens to What Youth Wants
Without a Probation Title Not	Visits Frequently
	Follows Up

Need for Accountability

Concern about the potential for abuse of the program was raised by youth in multiple groups. Certain criteria and expectations to continue receiving services and supports, such as avoiding new law violations, responding to contact attempts, attending school or working a regular job, counseling, and/or occasional drug tests, were suggested by some young adults. Other young adults felt that requirements should not be put on program participants and that there was little that could be done to avoid manipulation of the program.

Messaging

A few of the groups talked about how the program would need to be promoted in a unique, clear, and honest manner, in order to entice young adults to participate. They provided a couple specific suggestions. Youth suggested not calling it a "case", but a program; and, the "worker" something void of probation-like labels. Utilizing social media to help keep young adults connected and market the program was recommended, with Facebook being identified as the preferred method. The importance of relationships was underscored as a messaging/informational strategy, given that 49% of youth listed "in-person" as a preferred strategy for sharing information about extended supports and services. Ensuring that many of those serving youth and young adults were aware of the program and educating eligible youth about the program was offered as a strategy for improving involvement. The language used for such a program and its components matters.

Results: Provider Key Themes

Like the youth participants, providers had a number of questions, ideas, concerns related to the creation of an extended supports and services program. Conversely, they raised a greater number of thoughts related to program administration and implementation. Provider feedback has been broken down into pros/cons discussion, suggested services and key themes.

Pros and Cons Discussion

The first question of provider focus groups challenged participants to discuss benefits and drawbacks of an extended services and supports program. Though generally positive on the idea of a program of extended supports, participant responses ranged widely when it came to concerns. Pro and con themes are outlined below.

Pro: All 19 Year Olds Need Support to Successfully Transition to Adulthood.

Participants shared a general sense that 19 year olds are not prepared to survive on their own without support, and some probation youth have none. Providers expressed that youth need resources and assistance, and shouldn't be abandoned at an arbitrary age. Many participants expressed worry about 19 year olds who are currently "walking out to nothing." Probation officers described cases where they dropped clients off at shelters, or referred them to programs that might or might not continue to help them, because there was no transitional plan or aftercare program, and jurisdiction was terminating. Other participants used the word "travesty" to describe how youth work so hard in residential treatment to return to the same community and/or home environment, even against the youth's wishes. They expressed feeling that this made youth succeeding difficult. They shared feeling that extra support can help youth without natural supports do better on their own. Essentially, the belief that "kids are not always ready to be an adult" was echoed among most of the provider groups.

Pro: Highly Vulnerable Population with Likelihood to Enter Adult System

Participants expressed that there are very vulnerable, unconnected young people without caregivers to return to, leaving juvenile justice services; resulting in youth floundering and ending up in the adult system. Adding to their vulnerability, multiple groups brought up the "gap" between jurisdiction ending and the ability to apply for and access social services or public assistance. A program like this could bridge that gap, by enhancing guidance and accountability for youth. One participant connected this to the Bridge to Independence (B2I) program offered by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), stating, "As a community organization providing Central Access Navigation for SE service area, we have seen additional stability for youth who access B2I."

.

Pro: Close Gap for those Ineligible for Bridge to Independence

Many participants also raised the issue that some young people have had previous DHHS cases (OJS), but now are on probation and currently can't access, B2I even if they truly need it. Participants also expressed that there may be a high number of cases where there probably should have been child welfare involvement, but an abuse/neglect case (3(a)) was not filed or could not be filed due to age. Many youth age out without support. This program would mean those youth would have access to supports they need just as much as youth who are currently in B2I. Some participants felt that many of the probation youth were also wards and should be able to access B2I. Relatedly, one group suggested this program (B2I or otherwise) should be accessible to all 19-24 year olds who need it, whether or not they've been previously system-involved on either child welfare (3(a)) or delinquency (3(b)) charges.

Pro: Bridge to Independence as an Example

Many with knowledge and experience of B2I expressed a belief that it has been successful in offering supports such as housing etc. to the population it serves. Some talked about how this program included juvenile justice youth prior to its passage into law and served as an example that such a program can have a positive impact. Particular components of B2I were emphasized, particularly that it is voluntary and that a program for juvenile justice youth would likely need to be similarly optional

Con: Young Adults Won't Want to Participate

Nearly every group raised a concern with engaging this population to join the program, especially if it means remaining under court supervision and/or on "voluntary" probation. A sentiment that was expressed frequently was young people's desire to be "off papers" at all costs. For this reason, as you will see below, most groups seemed to conclude that the Office of Probation would not be the appropriate administrator of the program, or at least, it should not be called "probation" in any sense. Further, using the words "court

jurisdiction" may drive kids away from the system. One group brought up a consideration that since it would likely be voluntary, those that need it most may be those most likely to opt out.

Con: Lack of Consequence

One person noted that creating a voluntary program without affiliation with the court or link to the probation case would eliminate consequence for youth not following through. There was also concern expressed about some youth potentially taking advantage of the program, especially if a stipend is involved. The question of eligibility requirements came up often in this context. Participants wanted clarity on how to best capture the "right" candidates. This connected with fear expressed by a few individuals that this be a true transitional program, not an avenue for keeping young adults dependent on the government for assistance.

Con: Cost & Public Will

The final consequence is fairly straight-forward. The ability to find funding for such a program was expressed as a concern. Some participants linked this to public perception of youth with juvenile justice involvement as "bad kids" or rewarding those that had broken the law. It was expressed that these public beliefs could provide a challenge in leveraging public dollars ("taxpayer money") or getting lawmakers to pass necessary legislation. However, it was suggested that both sides could be sold, because that youth may be more likely to end up in the Department of Corrections without support making the program a cost-saving measure.

Con: Slippery Slope to Further System Involvement

One group expressed concern about the program starting as voluntary continued court involvement and eventually morphing into further involuntary involvement. For example, a young adult who signs up will have probation or DHHS involved in their life making any backslide or mistake more likely to be seen and result in criminal charges or a child protective services filing. Participants were concerned that this amplified the changes for the cycle of system involvement to be enhanced rather than minimized.

Con: Negative Impact on Bridge to Independence

One group raised a worry that extending B2I itself to juvenile justice youth could endanger B2I politically. Perhaps, a separate program may be safer.

<u>Suggested Services</u>

Prompts about what services should be included in an extended program were present in multiple of the questions. Several service areas were identified from these discussions. These are detailed below.

Suggested Services Discussion		
Service Type	*Specific Services*	*Need/Discussion*
Case Management	Life Coach or Navigator style Like B2I's Independence Coordinators Help access public supports Determining professional goals and steps necessary to pursue them	Distinct training needed, like that used by B2I
Basic Life Skills	Financial Literacy Opening & maintaining a checking account Budgeting Credit Literacy Personal Hygiene Getting to interviews and appointments on time	Independent living skills of all levels are needed and youth need time to practice and be coached in developing these.
Education & Employment	Completing College Applications, FAFSA aid	

Assistance	Financial Assistance in attending college or completing a G.E.D. Job Training Filling out job applications	
Finding Supports	Family Finding Community Connections Positive, Social Opportunities.	
Housing	Contract with transitional living programs or landlords	Too many homeless young adults Too few shelter beds Too few long-term housing assistance programs
Treatment	Mental Health Developmental Disability Ways to access needed treatment, Extended Medicaid coverage to pay for necessary medication and therapy Substance Abuse	One participant felt the program should *only* be offered for specific treatment purposes. Substance abuse is especially important for youth who turn 19 mid-program.
Transportation		Access to community resources can be difficult
Health	Extended Medical Coverage Physical Health Family Planning/Sexual Health	

Given that B2I came to mind for a number of participants when imagining structure, a discussion of whether or not a stipend, like that offered to B2I participants, should be offered arose in a few of the groups. Varying sentiments were given about providing a stipend. Many felt a stipend would be important and even necessary to engage youth with the program. Some were afraid of the political fall-out of "paying" youth who have committed crimes. Others thought the stipend money should go directly toward housing or utilities, savings account, groceries, etc., and not be discretionary. Regardless of specific feelings related to a stipend, most felt that the program should be tied to some form of education about becoming financially responsible

Key Themes

Population Needs and Deserves Extended Supports

Broad consensus across all provider groups was in support of some extended supports program on a voluntary basis, dependent on the program's structure and eligibility requirements. Some people thought it was "absolutely important" to provide this type of support. There was also some hesitation about how the program would work. Participants seemed to broadly concur that it would not be feasible to offer a comprehensive program like B2I to every probation-involved youth. Some suggested doing an approach similar to B2I by focusing on extremely disconnected youth with a long-term goal of widening to a larger population.

How Youth Gain Access/Transition into the Program Matters

Many participants worried youth would not take advantage of even short-term voluntary extensions of probation. Groups discussed the importance of program structure and marketing in order to encourage young adults to participate in the program. Some participants felt that youth with juvenile justice involvement would be more likely to access a program of extended supports if it was not facilitated by Probation and the courts. Additionally, the idea of transition planning was raised a few times, particularly in the context of moving a young person off of probation and into this separate program. Youth should know where they are going to be living, how they will be supported, and who they are going to call for help, well before they actually turn 19.

Youths' hypothetical entrance into this program from probation was also framed by participants as an important process. Some participants felt that the original juvenile case should be sealed, so that that is not a barrier to job search and/or secondary education. Another concern expressed addressed fear about the language of "aging out" being too restrictive and resulting in youth being artificially prolonged in placement or on

probation. One group brought up the concern that many youth need education about what system(s) they are involved in. They felt that there is often an unawareness of what system(s) they are involved in, so youth are very unaware of what services are available to them. A final suggestion about transition encompassed how to create grassroots messaging and/or a navigation system to help youth understand and utilize the services available to them was common among the groups. Timing was another factor viewed as important to the creation of this program. Overall, it appeared participants felt education and entrance methods of an extended supports program directly related to the level of young adult participation.

Flexible Eligibility Parameters Needed

Eligibility came up often. Most felt some eligibility requirements were needed. Many felt eligibility should be flexible enough that youth who need assistance are not categorically excluded. More than one group felt eligibility should be broader than "out of home placement". "Having a home to return to" was also problematic to a few groups – some young people might have a home to return to, but not a supportive or safe one. Another questions surrounding eligibility related to maintaining on-going eligibility. Would or should youth be kicked out of the program if not following through with their program requirements?

Participants acknowledged that some youth might realize they need assistance past after turning 19 and spending some time on their own. The flexibility of B2I, allowing young adults to move in and out of the program, was lauded and encouraged to be a component of eligibility for a program for youth with juvenile justice experience. Groups uniformly expressed that some form of support was important for this population, and also that this population shouldn't be forced into accepting it. Numerous groups felt the best way to achieve this might not be through the courts, since this group of youth might feel a stigma of continued court involvement (even voluntary), or that there might be confusion about voluntariness coming out of an otherwise-involuntary court case. One group brought up that since this type of program would not have the federal requirements of B2I, it could, likely, be administered outside of the courts.

A final question considered around eligibility was, "How the program could be tailored to catch the young people who need ongoing support, while filtering out those for whom it isn't necessary?" Several ideas were provided. These included:

- Anyone (attorney, probation, counselor, etc.) are able to refer a youth, and the program determines whether to accept. The court would not need to be involved.
- The court could order the program upon the youth's request.
- Not just out of home placement, but language of "no appropriate home to return to" or "lacks stable familial support" or something to that effect
- One group expressed that there should be "no wrong door" into the program, have multiple referral sources.
- Again, a strong sentiment that there are probation youth who could or should be 3(a) cases but aren't, and we should absolutely offer something to help them transition.
- One group of probation officers felt that it should be the same eligibility requirements as currently exist in b2I, but without the 3(a) requirement.
- Some participants felt the judge would be the most appropriate gatekeeper. Other participants were concerned that the judge or probation might be biased against certain youth.
- Another possibility suggested looking into the history of DHHS involvement or number of calls. If there is not a family support system or if support system is in chaos, or if there is chronic involvement, than those young adults should be given priority.
- Possibly focusing on a subset of the probation youth like 3(b) cases as an eligibility requirement.

Housing, Case Management, and Basic Life Skill Services are Essential

Housing, case management, and basic life skills were identified as essential services across all the groups. Participants discussed these services being offered in variety of ways. In addition to offering them as part of an extended supports program, participants offered other strategies for providing these services. Several groups discussed current programs or services that are already available to help segments of this population. Some

suggested creating a voucher-type program or a formal transition/referral program, possibly tied with some dedicated funding to reserve spaces for older youth. There was also a concern that all youth, not just 19 year olds, need this type of support when their case closes. Think more "aftercare" and less "continued jurisdiction."

Transition to Full Independence

Some participants expressed concern that any program be cautious to promote plan and pathway to independence rather than continued reliance on system support. Concern was expressed about the need for continued court involvement in order to access an extended services program. Most participants stated a belief that youth with juvenile justice involvement would not want to continue coming to court. Many felt courts themselves might be biased or unable to separate the new voluntary aspect of the case from the previous adversarial proceeding. Continued court involvement could also be linked to the concern about on-going oversight of youth increasing changes for a new criminal charge or child welfare involvement.

More focus on transitional living skills was offered by a number of participants. One group brought up the issue of better preparing youth for adulthood during the life of their probation cases, by enhancing readiness for adulthood via preparation in the system, especially with daily living skills. Several participants suggested that well-run transitional living programs that offer in-house case management services might be a good way to respond to this population's needs, during and after age 19. They suggested Probation (and others) be tasked and empowered with referring and coordinating the transition plan for youth with juvenile justice involvement. This illustrated a repeated reference to ensuring the mistakes made by the youth in the past did not follow them into adulthood more than absolutely necessary.

Comparison to Bridge to Independence

Participants were asked, "In some cases, youth who are in out of home placement due to juvenile justice involvement do not have a home to return to. Would you be in favor of policy changes that would allow these young adults to voluntarily enter the Bridge to Independence program if it was documented that they do not have a home to return to? " Broadly, the consensus was a conditional "yes" to B2I. Participants expressed a sense that DHHS has more connections to services and public assistance than Probation, and that if a good program is already built, we shouldn't recreate the wheel. On the other hand, some worried that B2I itself could be endangered if probation youth were included. There were also systematic concerns with IV-E eligibility and how case management would be different for youth depending on the funding source.

Groups were then asked, "If not Bridge to Independence, do you believe Probation should develop and administer a similar set of services for youth who do not have a home to return to?" The answer was a more emphatic "no". Most participants expressed that such a program did not easily mesh with the purpose and youth experience of probation, and that if Probation were to develop such a program, young people would run the other way. Conversely participants also felt that youth may already have a connection with their probation officer and bringing in yet a new system and group of people may drive youth away from the program. Many felt, however, that Probation would be the most appropriate *referral* source; an officer could identify a youth about to age out who would need the program, and work to set up the transition to voluntary "aftercare"-like services. Several groups brought up the idea of building off of existing infrastructure with a single referral point, rather than creating new program.

Mostly, however, the conversation on this question tended to center on the language of "out of home" and whether that was the right categorical eligibility requirement.

Items Requiring Further Investigation

These groups provide a number of valuable insights towards answering the three questions posed. Yet, they also raise several items that require additional discussion and exploration. These seem to fall into four areas: administration, eligibility, services and incentives, and messaging. Essential questions in each of these areas are offered below. It is suggested that these questions be considered in the larger stakeholder meetings to be held in September and October 2015.

Items for Exploration	
Area	*Key Questions*
Administration	• Who is the gatekeeper? • Who refers? • Who runs the program? • What case management and program strategies promote a road to independence that includes ongoing informal support people and personal skills that reduce future reliance/involvement in systems? • How can the program be structured to ensure connection with/enhancement of existing resources/services rather than creation of duplicative services? • How is oversight managed to prevent collateral consequences of juvenile charges and system involvement? • What structure could allow for needed supports while honoring legal adulthood?
Eligibility	• How do we structure eligibility so that youth who are entering adulthood without meaningful supports can access the program, without opening the floodgates? • How strict would reporting and ongoing eligibility requirements be? What would oversight/accountability look like to stay in the program (if at all)? • Accountability arose often. What consequence or accountability measures, if any, would be placed upon program participants? • What level of fluidity is appropriate for program involvement?
Services and Incentives	• How can youth be incentivized to maintain prosocial behavior? • Should there be a flexible stipend, or should a stipend be conditioned on specific usage? • Housing is a huge need. How would the program ensure that young adults can access safe and stable places to live? • How can services and incentives be structured in an empowerment and educational manner verses dictating behavior?
Messaging	• What education/training of formal and informal supports could be provided to allow for them to serve as a primary messenger for an extended supports program? • What strategies could be used about the importance/need of such a program to gain public will and legislative support? • How could the program be set up to ensure that language and labels don't create additional barriers to participation? • What mechanisms can be implemented to ensure youth receive clear, complete, and honest information about the program in a way that they understand and that addresses fears about continued system engagement?

Conclusions

Through these focus groups, voices from more than one hundred individuals was able to be gathered to ensure that broad stakeholder voice was considered in the Young Adults' Support and Services sub-committee's consideration of the original posed questions. Let us return to these questions.

First, "Are extended services and supports are needed?" Overall, a majority of participants expressed that a need existed. The need was especially emphasized for youth with minimal natural supports, long-term or deep system involvement, or who were aging out to homelessness or without completing a treatment program. Both providers and youth acknowledged that one of the greatest barriers to meeting this need would be addressing youths' fears and hesitation surrounding on-going system involvement and ensuring collateral consequences are minimized. Nonetheless, both audiences sited a number of current services and supports that are currently providing services that would be helpful if extended to age 21. Further, 45% of providers participating felt they had the ability within their organization to expand services. Collectively, it appears that a

strong desire and moderate ability to address the need of this population already exists; showing that further exploration via the large stakeholder meetings planned for September and October 2015 are warranted.

Exploration of the second question, that is the desired structure, services to be provided, and oversight mechanisms, garnered much less consensus. Two significant areas of varying opinion exists around whether attaching to the existing B2I program is advantageous, and the role of the court in such a program. Many of the pros and cons discussed by the provider groups and the fears expressed by youth groups speak to these two areas of disagreement. However, most participants seem to agree that the program would need to be administered differently from Probation services provided to those under 19 and would need to voluntary. These issues, alongside the specifics of oversight, will provide essential items for on-going program creation discussion.

A final issue to note when reflecting on these focus groups exists in the youth's strong expression of desire for positive, dependable support people to help them navigate the transition to adulthood. Illustration of this wish existed in the youth's description of who should be the main contact for the program, their description of helpful services, and their thoughts about how to best inform youth about supports and services. Further, provider results show recognition that such support is not present for many youth leaving probation at 19 and would be pivotal in easing their transition towards success.

These groups may mark the first step in an extensive process towards the creation of an extended supports and services program. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm shown and dedication to a collective approach represents a strong commitment to ensuring youth have what they need to succeed.

Appendix A: Young Adult Facilitation Guide
Juvenile Justice Extension of Services and Supports
Focus Groups
Facilitator's Guide

Overview

The Nebraska Probation Administration has made changes in the last couple of years to try to make sure youth with probation involvement have the help they need to make positive changes in their life. Probation is now exploring if they should offer services to youth when they reach age 19 and 20. And if so, what these services and supports should look like. They want to make sure that one of the most important voices, those of young adults currently getting Probation serves are able to share their thoughts. S**o, we need your help!**

Supported by the Young Adults Supports and Services sub-committee of the Children's Commission, a group of policy-makers, probation officers, service providers, and youth (the "stakeholder group") will be gathering in September and October to explore the need and potential structure of extended supports and services for youth who turn 19 on probation and in out of home placement. This group will look at three key things:

1. If such services and supports are needed.
2. If so, how they should be structured, provided, and what oversight is needed.
3. If so, what would it cost? (An outside agency, called Mainspring, is providing the fiscal analysis.)

This packet provides a guide on leading a youth focus group on the questions listed above. This guide includes the step-by-step process for your focus group. The stakeholder group also hopes that these focus groups inspire some young people to participate in the on-going exploration of these questions by attending meetings and providing further insight, as other opportunities emerge.

Thank you, in advance, for leading a focus group. Your efforts and those of the young adults in the focus group will be shaping procedures and policies that could positively affect youth for the years to come!

Focus group purpose

The youth focus groups aim to gather youth insight on the above questions. It is the goal to hear from youth who have current or recent experience with Probation. Gathering voices involved in all levels of the continuum of services, from diversion to YRTC/Detention, is important to the stakeholder group.

Helpful Information

- No matter the design, any programs or services created for 19 or 20 year olds would honor that youth are legally adults and participation would be voluntary.

Focus Group Basics

Attendees:

- Up to 12 young adults
- A facilitator
- A note-taker

Materials Needed:

- Chairs in a circle
- Printed copies of the questions and demographic sheet for each participant

Set-up:

- Print out questions for each participant
- Arrange chairs in a circle or around a table
- Decide who will lead the conversation and who will take notes

Facilitation tips:

- Keep number of participants around 12
- Take about an hour to complete questions
- Ensure the space allows for confidential conversations
- Minimize unnecessary adults/staff in the room
- Encourage all participants speak up
- Allow silence
- Minimize talk on other conversations
- Get through as many questions as possible, but encourage the youth to give in depth answers which may require some further prompting
- Allow them to write down any responses they do not feel comfortable sharing with the group

Facilitation Steps

1. Introductions

2. Session Overview

- Inform participants of the purpose of the focus group and that different focus groups are being held throughout the state to ensure stakeholders have lots of input from many different youth and young adults.
- Purpose: gather the voice of youth to help decide if a program designed to provide supports for youth turning 19 on Probation are needed and what such services might look like.
- Group will be about an hour, we will have an in-depth discussion around each question
- You can always write down any answers you don't feel comfortable sharing.
- You choose how much you participate. If you are uncomfortable at any time, you can choose to not say anything.

3. Review Confidentiality

- Input from these groups will be used to inform a group of stakeholders. Your ideas will be put with lots of other people's. NO names will be used in these findings/report.
- We will just focus on themes, not individuals or specific stories.
- So, try not to worry about what you say being held against you.

4. Ground Rules

- Ensure the space is a safe and confidential space
- Can create a set up expectations or respect for the group and ask the group if they can commit to following the guidelines

5. Complete Info Sheets to collect basic demographic information, be sure to collect these.

6. Handouts

- Pass out printed copies and inform participants of the option to write their responses as well.

7. Questions

- Walk through each of the questions, allow time for everyone to respond
- Ask prompting questions
- Can flow as a conversation as well

- Collect written responses when finished

Questions

Ice-Breaker question: Name and what services or support do you think is most important for youth supervised by Probation?

1. Right now, in Nebraska, court jurisdiction and probation stops at age 19 in juvenile cases. If you had the option to continue your probation case, at age 19, as a way to continue to get services, would you want to?
    a. Why or why not?

2. Are there services that probation is providing that you would want to continue?

3. If special services were provided to youth who had been involved with juvenile justice after they 19, what types of services are most important?
    a. Would you opt to keep your probation case open if that was the only way to continue receiving those services?

4. If services after 19 were available, would you want your current probation officer as your main contact?
    a. Why or why not?

5. Is there anything else you want to share?

Wrap-Up:
- Thank participants for the openness and time
- Answer any questions they may have

Post-session Steps:
- Compile notes, scan written responses, and email to crockwell@nebraskachildren.org
- Contact Cassy (402-817-2003/ crockwell@nebraskachildren.org), Juliet Summers (402.597.3100/jsummers@voicesforchildren.com), or Jeanne Brandner (402.471.4976/Jeanne.brandner@nebraska.gov) with any questions.

Appendix B: Young Adult Assent Form
Participant Assent Form

Introduction
You are being asked to participate in a focus group as part of an information-gathering effort to help a stakeholder group of advocates, service providers, policy makers, family members, youth, and state officials explore whether or not to offer more services to kids when they reach age 19 and 20. And if so, what these services and supports should look like. The stakeholder group is looking at three questions.

4. If such services and supports are needed.
5. If so, how they should be structured, provided, and what oversight is needed.
6. If so, what would it cost? (An outside agency, called Mainspring, is providing the fiscal analysis.)

Focus groups will consist of a series of discussion questions and anonymous informational survey. Questions asked will cover if these serves are wanted, what they should look like and who should have oversight. Groups are facilitated by staff of Project Everlast, Voices for Children, Nebraska Probation Administration, or a community-based services/program that you are already involved in, so they will take place in a safe environment.

Voluntary
Focus group participation is completely voluntary and you/your teen can stop at any time or skip questions.

Confidentiality
Approximately five focus groups will be held across the state with notes from each group being combined before any results are presented. Names are not collected, unless offered voluntarily, nor are they put in the notes. Information gathered will be used to write a report that will be presented to the stakeholder group with the purpose of helping develop recommendations and make decisions. The report will focus on themes, not specific people or stories. No names will be reported to stakeholder members or Probation. Only notes from each focus group and information sheets will be gathered. Nothing said in this group will be held against participants in anyway.

Potential Risks
It is possible you may experience sadness, disappointment or other emotions, as you share your experiences during the focus group. To minimize this risk, you will only be asked to share when you wish and conversation will be directed in a way that avoids potential problems.

Questions
If you have questions, contact Cassy (402-817-2003/crockwell@nebraskachildren.org), Juliet Summers (402.597.3100/jsummers@voicesforchildren.com), or Jeanne Brandner (402.471.4976/Jeanne.brandner@nebraska.gov) with any questions.

After reading this form and receiving answers to all your questions. Please check the box associated with your decision for participation.

❑ I agree to participate ❑ I decline to participate

Participant (Print Name): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Young Adult Feedback Form

Juvenile Justice Services Extension – Youth Feedback
About You

Answer the below questions and return to the person leading your group or to Cassy Rockwell at 215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200, Lincoln NE 68508, crockwell@nebraskachildren.org, or fax to 402.476.9486. You do not have to put your name on this form. This information will be used only to capture the demographics of youth participants.

Age: _____ Town You Call Home: _____

1. What is your gender?
   - ❑ Male
   - ❑ Female
   - ❑ Trans or Transgender
   - ❑ Other (please specify):_____

2. Check your current living situation.
   - ❑ Biological Family
   - ❑ Adoptive Home
   - ❑ Foster Home
   - ❑ Guardianship Home
   - ❑ In My Own Apartment/House
   - ❑ Homeless/Couch-surfing
   - ❑ Group Home
   - ❑ YRTC
   - ❑ Treatment Program
   - ❑ Other (please specify): _____

3. Please check which Probation services you are (or were) involved in?
   - ❑ Diversion
   - ❑ Day/Evening Reporting
   - ❑ Tracker
   - ❑ Electronic Monitor
   - ❑ Mental Health/Counseling
   - ❑ Community Service
   - ❑ Substance Abuse Treatment
   - ❑ Educational Services
   - ❑ Drug Court
   - ❑ Other (Please Specify) _____

4. How long have you been involved, or were you involved in the Juvenile Justice System?
   - ❑ 0-2 years
   - ❑ 2-4 years
   - ❑ 4-6 years
   - ❑ 6-8 years
   - ❑ 8-10 years
   - ❑ 10 years or longer

5. Should Probation offer voluntary services for youth after the age of 19?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ No
   - ❑ Not Sure

6. If services were offered to youth with juvenile justice experience after age 19, what's the best way to keep youth informed of these services? (check all that apply)
   - ❑ Email
   - ❑ Social Media
   - ❑ Texting
   - ❑ Web Site
   - ❑ In-person Meetings
   - ❑ Other (Please Specify) _____

7. If you said that Social Media was the best way to keep you informed which social media do you prefer? (check all that apply)
   - ❑ Twitter
   - ❑ Facebook
   - ❑ Pinterest
   - ❑ Google+
   - ❑ Linked In
   - ❑ Other? (Please Specify) _____

8. In terms of racial background, how do you identify yourself?
   - ❑ White
   - ❑ African American/Black
   - ❑ Hispanic/Latino
   - ❑ Asian
   - ❑ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   - ❑ Native American/Alaskan Native
   - ❑ Other (please specify): _____

9. In terms of your ethnicity, how do you identify yourself?
   - ❑ Latino/Hispanic
   - ❑ Non-Latino/Non-Hispanic

Juvenile Justice Service Extension Young Adult Survey

Instructions

The Nebraska Probation Administration has made changes in the last couple of years to try to make sure youth with probation involvement have the help they need to make positive changes in their life. Probation is now exploring if they should offer services to youth when they reach age 19 and 20. And if so, what these services and supports should look like. They want to make sure that the voices of young adults currently getting Probation services are heard. Because you know what Juvenile Justice is like, we want your help!

Supported by the Young Adults Supports and Services sub-committee of the Children's Commission, a group of policy-makers, probation officers, service providers, and youth (the "stakeholder group") will be gathering in September and October to explore the need and potential structure of extended supports and services at age 19 and 20 for youth with juvenile justice experience. This group will look at:

1. If such services and supports are needed.
2. If so, how they should be structured, provided, and what oversight is needed.
3. If so, what would it cost? (An outside agency, called Mainspring, will do this.)

Below you'll find questions to help make the law work in the best way possible. Your answers will be combined with everyone else's answers and presented to foster parents, policy makers, service professionals and other youth at a meeting on September 18th, 2015 to help decide if services should be offered after age 19. Your personal answers will not be connected back to you, so feel free to be honest. ***Answering any question and/or speaking during the focus group is COMPLETELY YOUR CHOICE. You can choose to skip any (or all questions) both on this handout and in the group.***

Questions

1. Right now, in Nebraska, court jurisdiction and probation stops at age 19 in juvenile cases. If you had the option to continue your probation case, at age 19, as a way to continue to get services, would you want to?

    a. Why or why not?

2. Are there services that probation is providing that you would want to continue?

3. If special services were provided to youth who had been involved with juvenile justice after they 19, what types of services are most important?

    a. Would you opt to keep your probation case open if that was the only way to continue receiving those services?

4. If services after 19 were available, would you want your current probation officer as your main contact?

    a. Why or why not?

5. Is there anything else you want to share?

6. If you'd like to be contacted about opportunities to be involved in the stakeholder group, list your name and contact information below.

Appendix D: Adult Facilitation Guide

Juvenile Justice Extension of Services and Supports
Focus Groups
Facilitator's Guide

Overview

Supported by the Young Adults Supports and Services sub-committee of the Children's Commission, a group of policy-makers, probation officers, service providers, and youth (the "stakeholder group") will be gathering in September and October to explore the need and potential structure of extended supports and services for youth as they age out of juvenile probation at age 19. This group will look at three key things:

1. If such services and supports are needed.
2. If so, how they should be structured, provided, and what oversight is needed.
3. If so, what would it cost? (An outside agency, called Mainspring, is providing the fiscal analysis.)

This packet provides a guide on leading a focus group on the questions listed above. This guide includes the step-by-step process for your focus group. Thank you, in advance, for leading a focus group. Your efforts and those of the focus group participants will be shaping procedures and policies that could positively affect youth for the years to come!

Focus group purpose

The focus groups aim to gather practical insight on the above questions. It is the goal to hear from multiple perspectives what the real needs and challenges are for young people as they age out of juvenile court jurisdiction. Gathering voices involved in all levels of the continuum of services, from diversion to YRTC/Detention, from judges and lawyers to probation officers and treatment providers, and from urban to rural jurisdictions, is important to the stakeholder group.

Helpful Information

- No matter the design, any programs or services created this young adult population would honor that participants are legally adults and participation would be voluntary.

Focus Group Basics

Attendees:

- Up to 12 participants
- A facilitator
- A note-taker

Materials Needed:

- Chairs in a circle
- Printed copies of the questions and demographic sheet for each participant

Set-up:

- Print out questions for each participant
- Arrange chairs in a circle or around a table
- Decide who will lead the conversation and who will take notes

Facilitation tips:

- Keep number of participants around 12
- Take about an hour to complete questions
- Ensure the space allows for confidential conversations
- Encourage all participants to give input
- Allow silence
- Minimize talk on other conversations
- Get through as many questions as possible, but encourage participants to give in depth answers which may require some further prompting
- Allow participants to write down any responses they do not feel comfortable sharing with the group

Facilitation Steps

1. Introductions

2. Session Overview
- Inform participants of the purpose of the focus group and that different focus groups are being held throughout the state to ensure stakeholders have lots of input from many different youth and young adults.
- Purpose: gather input to help decide if a program designed to provide supports for youth turning 19 on Probation are needed and what such services might look like.
- Group will be about an hour, we will have an in-depth discussion around each question
- You can always write down any answers you don't feel comfortable sharing.
- You choose how much you participate. If you are uncomfortable at any time, you can choose to not say anything.

3. Review Confidentiality
- Input from these groups will be used to inform a group of stakeholders. Your ideas will be put with lots of other people's. NO names will be used in these findings/report.
- We will just focus on themes, not individuals or specific stories.

4. Ground Rules
- Ensure the space is a safe and confidential space
- Can create a set up expectations or respect for the group and ask the group if they can commit to following the guidelines

5. Complete Info Sheets to collect basic demographic information, be sure to collect these.

6. Handouts
- Pass out printed copies and inform participants of the option to write their responses as well.

7. Questions
- Walk through each of the questions, allow time for everyone to respond
- Ask prompting questions
- Can flow as a conversation as well
- Collect written responses when finished

Questions

Ice-Breaker question: Name and what services or support do you think is most important for youth supervised by Probation?

1. Do you think Nebraska should allow extended court jurisdiction and/or probation oversight on a voluntary basis beyond age 19 where continued treatment and services are needed and agreed to?

    a. What do you see as pros and cons of this policy?

2. In some cases, youth who are in out of home placement due to juvenile justice involvement do not have a home to return to. Would you be in favor of policy changes allowing these young adults to voluntarily enter the Bridge to Independence program if it was documented that they do not have a home to return to?

    a. If not Bridge to Independence, do you believe Probation should develop and administer a similar set of services for youth who do not have a home to return to?

3. For the broader population of youth under probation oversight, do you believe it is important to offer extended supports and services at age after a youth turns 19? Why or why not?

4. If yes, what types of services do you see as most important to offer?

5. Who should be the main referral source and provide the case management for extended services?

Wrap-Up:

- Thank participants for their openness and time
- Answer any questions they may have

Post-session Steps:

- Compile notes, scan written responses, and email to Juliet Summers (402.597.3100/jsummers@voicesforchildren.com),
- Contact Juliet or Jeanne Brandner (402.471.4976/Jeanne.brandner@nebraska.gov) with any questions.

Appendix E: Adult Assent Form

Participant Assent Form

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a focus group as part of an information-gathering effort to help a stakeholder group of advocates, service providers, policy makers, family members, youth, and state officials explore whether or not to offer more services to young adults aging out of probation at age 19, and if so, what these services and supports should look like. The stakeholder group is looking at three questions.

7. If such services and supports are needed.
8. If so, how they should be structured, provided, and what oversight is needed.
9. If so, what would it cost? (An outside agency, called Mainspring, is providing the fiscal analysis.)

Focus groups will consist of a series of discussion questions and anonymous informational survey. Questions asked will cover if these serves are wanted, what they should look like and who should have oversight. Groups are facilitated by staff of Project Everlast, Voices for Children, Nebraska Probation Administration, or a community-based services/program that you are already involved in.

Voluntary

Focus group participation is completely voluntary.

Confidentiality

Approximately five focus groups will be held across the state with notes from each group being combined before any results are presented. Names are not collected, unless offered voluntarily, nor are they put in the notes. Information gathered will be used to write a report that will be presented to the stakeholder group with the purpose of helping develop recommendations and make decisions. The report will focus on themes, not specific people or stories. No names will be reported. Only notes from each focus group and information sheets will be gathered. Nothing said in this group will be held against participants in anyway.

Questions

If you have questions, please ask your facilitator or contact
Juliet Summers (402.597.3100/jsummers@voicesforchildren.com), or
Jeanne Brandner (402.471.4976/Jeanne.brandner@nebraska.gov).

After reading this form and receiving answers to all your questions, please check the box associated with your decision for participation.

❑ I agree to participate ❑ I decline to participate

Participant (Print Name): _____

Participant's Signature: _____Date: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS ASSENT FORM TO YOUR FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR, OR BY E-MAIL OR FAX TO: jsummers@voicesforchildren.com 402-597-2705.

Appendix F: Adult Feedback Form

Juvenile Justice Services Extension – Adult Feedback

Answer the below questions and return to the person leading your group or to Juliet Summers at 7521 Main St. Omaha, NE 68127, jsummers@voicesforchildren.com, or fax to 402.597-2705. You do not have to put your name on this form. This information will be used only to capture the demographics of focus group participants.

City/County/District (please list any you work in): _____

10. What is your primary role in working with youth on probation?
    - ❑ Judge
    - ❑ Lawyer (please specify role): _____
    - ❑ Probation officer
    - ❑ Government official or staff
    - ❑ Shelter or group home staff
    - ❑ Treatment provider
    - ❑ Detention or YRTC staff
    - ❑ Diversion coordinator
    - ❑ Educator, school administrator, or tutor
    - ❑ Other (please specify): _____

11. If you have previous experience in another role(s) serving the juvenile justice population, please list here: _____

12. Please check which, if any, Probation services you provide:
    - ❑ Diversion
    - ❑ Day/Evening Reporting
    - ❑ Tracker
    - ❑ Electronic Monitor
    - ❑ Mental Health/Counseling
    - ❑ Community Service
    - ❑ Substance Abuse Treatment
    - ❑ Educational Services
    - ❑ Drug Court
    - ❑ Other (Please Specify) _____

13. How long have you worked in juvenile justice or with at-risk youth?
    - ❑ 0-5 years
    - ❑ 6-10 years
    - ❑ 11-15 years
    - ❑ 16-20 years
    - ❑ 20 years or longer

14. Should Probation or another entity offer voluntary services for probation-involved youth after the age of 19?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ Not Sure

15. If services were offered to youth with juvenile justice experience after age 19, would you and/or your organization be able to extend your own work to include this population?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ Not sure
    - ❑ Not applicable

16. In terms of racial background, how do you identify yourself?
    - ❑ White
    - ❑ African American/Black
    - ❑ Hispanic/Latino
    - ❑ Asian
    - ❑ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
    - ❑ Native American/Alaskan Native
    - ❑ Other (please specify): _____

17. In terms of your ethnicity, how do you identify yourself?
    - ❑ Latino/Hispanic
    - ❑ Non-Latino/Non-Hispanic

18. What is your gender?
    - ❑ Male
    - ❑ Female
    - ❑ Trans or Transgender
    - ❑ Other (please specify):_____

Juvenile Justice Service Extension Adult Survey

Instructions

The Nebraska Probation Administration has made changes in the last couple of years to try to make sure youth with probation involvement have the help they need to make positive changes in their life. A taskforce of the Children's Commission is now looking at whether Probation should offer extended, voluntary supports to youth beyond the age of 19, and if so, what these services and supports should look like. The taskforce will be meeting in September and October to explore the need and potential structure of extended supports and services beyond age 19 for youth with juvenile justice experience. This group will look at:

1. If such services and supports are needed.
2. If so, how they should be structured, provided, and what oversight is needed.
3. If so, what would it cost? (An outside agency, called Mainspring, will do this.)

Below are the questions discussed in the focus group. Please feel free to fill out this survey with additional thoughts or concerns. Your answers will be combined with everyone else's answers and presented to the taskforce at a meeting on September 18th, 2015 to help decide if services should be offered after age 19. ***Answering any question and/or speaking during the focus group is voluntary and input will not be individually reported. You can choose to skip any (or all) questions both on this handout and in the group.***

Questions

1. Do you think Nebraska should allow extended court jurisdiction and probation oversight on a voluntary basis beyond age 19 where continued treatment and services are needed and agreed to?

    a. What do you see as pros and cons of this policy?

2. In some cases, youth who are in out of home placement due to juvenile justice involvement do not have a home to return to. Would you be in favor of policy changes allowing these young adults to voluntarily enter the Bridge to Independence program if it was documented that they do not have a home to return to?

    a. If not Bridge to Independence, do you believe Probation should develop and administer a similar set of services for youth who do not have a home to return to?

3. For the broader population of youth under probation oversight, do you believe it is important to offer extended supports and services at age after a youth turns 19? Why or why not?

4. If yes, what types of services do you see as most important to offer?

5. Who should be the main referral source and provide the case management for extended services?

Appendix C

EXTENDED SUPPORTS AND SERVICES FOCUS GROUPS: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK
COMPILED: SEPTEMBER 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Young Adults' Supports and Services Sub-committee of the Children's Commission, in partnership with the Nebraska Probation Administration is exploring the need and potential structure of a supports and services program for 19 and 20 year old young adults with juvenile justice system involvement and minimal natural supports. To ensure stakeholders had a voice in the development of such a program, 16 focus groups were held in early September 2015; 8 with young adults and 8 with adult stakeholders. All youth groups were held in person.

KEY THEMES - YOUTH

- We are afraid to loss our adult freedoms and want to be done with the system.
- Services MUST be voluntary, informal, and respect my personal choices.
- Don't forget about the awesome work already happening in my community…instead of something new, just help me be better connected.
- Life is hard and some youth need and want help.
- Youth need time, practice and support to transition.
- Support, listen and care about us. Personal connections MATTER!
- We deserve to have expectations and accountability.
- Be creative in talking about and 'selling' the program.

KEY THEMES – PROVIDER

- Young adults are leaving our system without connections and deserve extended supports.
- How Youth Gain Access/Transition into the Program Matters.
- Eligibility MUST be flexible!
- Housing, case management, and basic life skill services are essential.
- Ensure transition to independence; avoid further system reliance.

CASE MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS – YOUTH

Case Management Suggestions	
Alternative Support People	*Support Person Traits*
Mentor of the Youth's Choosing	Understand the program and services available
Drug & Alcohol Counselor	Nice/Kind/Supportive
Youth Counselor (like those at YRTC)	Respectful
Alumni of Juvenile Justice System	Understanding
Volunteer	Honest
Older with More Life Experience	Listens to What Youth Wants
Without a Probation Title Not	Visits Frequently
	Follows Up

REFERRAL/IDENTIFICATION PROCESS SUGGESTIONS – PROVIDER

Providers had many thoughts concerning how the program could be tailored to catch the young people needing ongoing support, while filtering out those for whom it isn't necessary. Several ideas were provided, including:

- Anyone (attorney, probation, counselor, etc.) are able to refer a youth, and the program determines whether to accept. The court would not need to be involved.
- The court could order the program upon the youth's request.
- Not just out of home placement, but language of "no appropriate home to return to" or "lacks stable familial support" or something to that effect
- One group expressed that there should be "no wrong door" into the program, have multiple referral sources.

- Again, a strong sentiment that there are probation youth who could or should be 3(a) cases but aren't, and we should absolutely offer something to help them transition.
- One group of probation officers felt that it should be the same eligibility requirements as currently exist in b2I, but without the 3(a) requirement.
- Some participants felt the judge would be the most appropriate gatekeeper. Other participants were concerned that the judge or probation might be biased against certain youth.
- Another possibility suggested looking into the history of DHHS involvement or number of calls. If there is not a family support system or if support system is in chaos, or if there is chronic involvement, than those young adults should be given priority.
- Possibly focusing on a subset of the probation youth like 3(b) cases as an eligibility requirement.

PRO'S & CON'S DISCUSSION – PROVIDER

Pros:

- All 19 year olds need support to successfully transition to adulthood.
- Highly vulnerable population with likelihood to enter adult system
- Close gap for those ineligible for Bridge to Independence
- Bridge to Independence provides an example

Cons

- Young adults won't want to participate
- Lack of consequence
- Cost & public will
- Slippery slope to further system involvement
- Negative impact on Bridge to Independence

DESIRED SERVICES - YOUTH

Desired Services and Supports		
Type of Service	*Offered while Probation-Involved*	*Available via Extension Program*
Treatment	Substance Abuse Counseling Urine Analysis/Drug Tests	Counseling Drug and Alcohol Treatment Urine Analysis/Drug Testing
Life Skills	Pregnancy/Parenting Practice with daily living skills Financial Literacy	Moving/Housing/Leases/Renter's Rights Pregnancy/Parenting Cooking/ How to Buy Groceries Independent Living Budgeting/How to Pay Bills Getting State ID and other documents
Social	Connection to Social, fun, community, and civic Groups	Fun, Positive Social Groups Help finding new social groups/positive friends
Coaching/Personal Support	Day Reporting Someone to "check in"	Service Navigation One-stop shop organization Help Accessing Other Services & Systems (food stamps, vocational rehabilitation, disability, etc.) Someone to Check-in/Call for Help Guidance
Employment & Education	Job Skills Resume Creation/Building How to Search for Jobs	Career/Education Resources Help Job and College Searching Education Services and Scholarships Employment Skills and Search Summer Housing while in College
Other	Medicaid Thinking for a Change Car/Transportation	Transportation Medical Coverage Utility Assistance Car Programs including how to get insurance, registration

DESIRED SERVICES - PROVIDER

Suggested Services Discussion		
Service Type	*Specific Services*	*Need/Discussion*
Case Management	Life Coach or Navigator style Like B2I's Independence Coordinators Help access public supports Determining professional goals and action steps	Distinct training needed, like that used by B2I
Basic Life Skills	Financial Literacy Opening & maintaining a checking account Budgeting/Credit Literacy Personal Hygiene Getting to interviews and appointments on time	Independent living skills of all levels are needed and youth need time to practice and be coached in developing these.
Education & Employment Assistance	Completing College Applications, FAFSA/Financial Assistance in attending college or completing a G.E.D. Job Training/Filling out job applications	
Finding Supports	Family Finding Community Connections Positive, Social Opportunities.	Access to community resources can be difficult Lack of transportation
Housing	Contract with transitional living programs or landlords	Too many homeless young adults Too few shelter beds and long-term housing assistance programs
Treatment	Mental Health Developmental Disability Ways to access needed treatment, Extended Medicaid coverage Substance Abuse	One participant felt the program should *only* be offered for specific treatment purposes. Substance abuse is especially important for youth who turn 19 mid-program.
Health	Extended Medical Coverage Physical Health Family Planning/Sexual Health	

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Focus groups raised a number of important questions in four areas.

Administration

- Who is the gatekeeper?
- Who refers?
- Who runs the program?
- What case management and program strategies promote a road to independence that includes ongoing informal support people and personal skills that reduce future reliance/involvement in systems?
- How is oversight managed to prevent collateral consequences of juvenile involvement?
- How is oversight managed to prevent collateral consequences of juvenile charges and system involvement?
- What structure could allow for needed supports while honoring legal adulthood?

Eligibility

- How do we structure eligibility so that youth who are entering adulthood without meaningful supports can access the program, without opening the floodgates?
- How strict would reporting and ongoing eligibility requirements be? What would oversight/accountability look like to stay in the program (if at all)?

- What level of fluidity is appropriate for program involvement?

Services and Incentives
- How can youth be incentivized to maintain pro-social behavior?
- Should there be a flexible stipend, or should a stipend be conditioned on specific usage?
- Housing is a huge need. How would the program ensure that young adults can access safe and stable places to live?

Messaging
- What education/training of formal and informal supports could be provided to allow for them to serve as a primary messenger for an extended supports program?
- What strategies could be used about the importance/need of such a program to gain public will and legislative support?
- How could the program be set up to ensure that language and labels don't create additional barriers to participation?
- What mechanisms can be implemented to ensure youth receive clear, complete, and honest information about the program in a way that they understand and that addresses fears about continued system engagement?

Appendix C
Fiscal Analysis

Fiscal Analysis of Young People under the Jurisdiction of the AOP Opting into Bridge to Independence

Programs	2016	2017	2018
Description - Costs of Extending Care to 21			
Estimated number of JJ youth in voluntary care per month at age 19	39	40	41
Estimated number of JJ youth in voluntary care per month at age 20	26	25	25
Average monthly maintanence cost - relative foster care	$519.29	$534.87	$550.91
Average monthly maintenance cost - direct stipends	$760	$760	$760
Number of youth expected to receive direct stipends	65	65	66
Total Average monthly cost - direct stipends	**$49,400**	**$49,400**	**$50,160**
Total annual maintenance cost	**$592,800**	**$592,800**	**$601,920**
Total Monthly Administrative Cost for Direct Stipends	$29,640	$29,640	$30,096
Total annual administrative costs (host homes & direct stipends)	**$29,640**	**$29,640**	**$30,096**
Foster Care Review Office Costs	$560	$577	$594
Total Foster Care Review Office Costs	**$72,800**	**$74,984**	**$78,422**
Public caseworker average salary and benefits	$47,681.67	$49,112.12	$50,585.48
Number of youth per caseworker	16	16	16
Public caseworker total cost	$193,706.78	$199,517.99	$208,665.12
Public supervisor average salary and benefits	$64,978	$66,927	$68,935
Number of youth per supervisor	96	96	96
Supervisor Total Cost	$43,995.52	$45,315.39	$47,392.92
Total annual case management costs	**$237,702**	**$244,833**	**$256,058**
Total Operating Costs	**$95,081**	**$97,933**	**$102,423**
Average Monthly Medicaid Expenditure Per Youth (STATE SHARE ONLY)	$173	$178	$184
Total Annual Medicaid Expenditure	**$134,940**	**$138,988**	**$145,360**
Total Estimated Expenses - Extending Care to 21	**$1,162,963**	**$1,179,179**	**$1,214,279**
Revenues			
FC IV-E Penetration Rate 1 - With VPA Model	0.2200	0.2200	0.2200
FMAP rate	0.5327	0.5327	0.5327
Total Annual IV-E Maintenance Revenue	**$69,473**	**$69,473**	**$70,541**
IV-E Administrative Rate	0.50	0.50	0.50
Total Annual IV-E Administrative Revenue	**$47,875**	**$49,213**	**$51,370**
Estimated Total Annual Title IV-E Revenue	**$117,347**	**$118,686**	**$121,911**
Total State Share Care to 21 Expenses	**$1,045,616**	**$1,060,493**	**$1,092,368**

Fiscal Analysis of 3B Wards under the Jurisdiction of DHHS Opting into Bridge to Independence[7]

Programs	2016	2017	2018
Description - Costs of Extending Care to 21			
Estimated number of DHHS 3B youth in voluntary care per month at age 19	37	0	0
Estimated number of DHHS 3B youth in voluntary care per month at age 20	0	37	0
Average monthly maintanence cost - relative foster care	$519.29	$534.87	$550.91
Average monthly maintenance cost - direct stipends	$760	$760	$760
Number of youth expected to receive direct stipends	37	37	0
Total Average monthly cost - direct stipends	**$28,120**	**$28,120**	**$0**
Total annual maintenance cost	**$337,440**	**$337,440**	**$0**
Total Monthly Administrative Cost for Direct Stipends	$16,872	$16,872	$0
Total annual administrative costs (host homes & direct stipends)	**$16,872**	**$16,872**	**$0**
Foster Care Review Office Costs	$560	$577	$594
Total Foster Care Review Office Costs	**$41,440**	**$42,683**	**$0**
Public caseworker average salary and benefits	$47,681.67	$49,112.12	$50,585.48
Number of youth per caseworker	16	16	16
Public caseworker total cost	$110,263.86	$113,571.78	$0.00
Public supervisor average salary and benefits	$64,978	$66,927	$68,935
Number of youth per supervisor	96	96	96
Supervisor Total Cost	$25,043.60	$25,794.91	$0.00
Total annual case management costs	**$135,307**	**$139,367**	**$0**
Total Operating Costs	**$54,123**	**$55,747**	**$0**
Average Monthly Medicaid Expenditure Per Youth (STATE SHARE ONLY)	$173	$178	$184
Total Annual Medicaid Expenditure	**$76,812**	**$79,116**	**$0**
Total Estimated Expenses - Extending Care to 21	**$661,994**	**$671,225**	**$0**
Revenues			
FC IV-E Penetration Rate 1 - With VPA Model	0.2200	0.2200	0.2200
FMAP rate	0.5327	0.5327	0.5327
Total Annual IV-E Maintenance Revenue	**$39,546**	**$39,546**	**$0**
IV-E Administrative Rate	0.50	0.50	0.50
Total Annual IV-E Administrative Revenue	**$27,252**	**$28,014**	**$0**
Estimated Total Annual Title IV-E Revenue	**$66,798**	**$67,559**	**$0**
Total State Share Care to 21 Expenses	**$595,197**	**$603,665**	**$0**

[7] Because complete date regarding the demographics of 3B wards under the jurisdiction of DHHS was not available, this fiscal analysis assumes that the remaining 37 3B wards will turn 19 in 2016 and voluntarily opt into b2i. This analysis also assumes that these 37 young people will remain a part of b2i until they turn age 21. As a result, these assumptions represent the highest possible estimate of additional expenses related to the expansion of b2i to this population in 2016 and 2017.

EVALUATION AND DATA WORKGROUP REPORT

November 3, 2015

The Evaluation and Data Workgroup of the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee reconvened in September 2015 to discuss program processes, review the state statute and previous recommendations, and develop a new set of recommendations for 2016. Workgroup members met in person on 9/2/15 and 10/6/15 and by phone on 10/28/15. Below is a summary of key findings from current program data and a new set of recommendations.

CURRENT STATUS

Program Data

The Evaluation and Data workgroup was unable to obtain results from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) survey, DHHS's current primary method of evaluating program effectiveness. NYTD is administered to program participants upon enrollment and every 6 months after. Additionally, the workgroup was not provided with reasons for early discharges from the program, as required in Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4512. Below is a summary of data the workgroup was able to obtain, reflecting the last 10 months of implementation (December 2014 through September 2015):

- The number of young adults in the program has consistently grown each month, from 96 in December 2014 to 146 in September 2015
- An average of 10 young adults per month signed Voluntary Services and Support Agreements
- Well over half were identified as female (64%)
- The majority have resided in the ESA and NSA (56%), as opposed to the SESA, CSA, and WSA (44%)
- The percentage of IV-E eligible young adults has fluctuated a bit month-to-month, with an overall average of 20% (21% in September were eligible)
- 53 young adults have left the program since December: 26 "graduated" (turned 21), and 27 were terminated due to either loss of contact with their Independence Coordinator or failure to meet one of the eligibility requirements
- On average, 97% had contact with their Independence Coordinator within the last 30 days

Looking at the 146 young adults who were enrolled in the program in September:

- 5 were living out-of-state
- 11 were pregnant or expecting, and 28 had dependents
- 7 were "couch surfing"; none were in a shelter
- 6 graduated from the program; 5 were terminated
- 91% received Medicaid within the last month; 5 were covered by Letters of Entitlement
- 33% were meeting the educational requirement, 42% were meeting the employment requirement, and 21% were working to remove barriers to employment
- 51 had an IEP while they were in foster care, and 98 had a mental health diagnosis while in care

Adoption & Guardianship Assistance

A total of four young adults have participated in the adoption assistance piece of the program. Similarly, four young adults have participated in the guardianship assistance piece, although all four were transitioned into the core program per state statute in July. No early discharges have occurred within these populations.

Satisfaction Survey Results

Satisfaction surveys have been collected by DHHS from nine young adults statewide. These satisfaction surveys were designed by the Evaluation Workgroup and adopted by DHHS. Results from these surveys are highlighted below.

- **Sex:** 7 were female, 2 were male
- **Length of time in program:** 4 were in the program 1-3 months, 1 was in the program 4-6 months, 1 was in the program 7-9 months, and 3 were in the program 10-12 months
- **Race/ethnicity:** 5 were white, 2 were Black/African American, 1 was Hispanic/Latino, and 1 was Russian

Participants were asked to respond to the following items on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The average score of all 9 participants is listed below for each time.

General Questions	
The information I received about the Bridge to Independence program was easy to understand (including printed materials and verbal explanations from DHHS staff).	4.7
I helped lead the development of my Transitional Living Plan.	4.4
I believe the needs and goals in my Transitional Living Plan (including the services I am to receive) meet my needs and will help me become more independent.	4.6
Program Satisfaction Questions	
My Independence Coordinator listens to me and treats me with dignity and respect.	5
My Independence Coordinator communicates and explains things in a way I can understand.	5
My Independence Coordinator is available to meet or talk on the phone when I need him/her, or at times that are convenient to me.	5
My Independence Coordinator takes the time to get to know me and build a positive relationship with me.	5
My Independence Coordinator helped (or is helping) me identify an adult or family member to be a support after I leave the Bridge to Independence program.	4.8
My Independence Coordinator has helped me learn independent living skills.	4.8

Young people were also asked to respond to the following questions. Their answers are typed verbatim below.

What is your favorite thing about the program?

Easy going, voluntary. Help and support.

Having someone there if I need anything. The help.

The support it provides both financially and mentally. Helps young adults that don't have help from "mommy and daddy" go get on feet and be success.

The information, mentor, and what the program offers.

Good communication between [my worker] and I.

What is your least favorite thing?

I just wish [my worker] was more strict and pushing me.

Nothing really except the short length of it.

I wasn't in it long enough because of my age.

What would you change about the program?

The length we can be involved with it. Age range.

Don't let people "piggy back" off the system.

Why are you leaving the program?

Aging out. I'm about to be 21.

I'm too old now. I aged out.

Aging out and graduating from program.

How did the program help you?

Helped me with job finding, helped me learn more community resources. Very good program.

With a lot. Helped financially.

Help me get the things I need and more information on other programs.

Saving money mostly, still [my worker] has been helpful in my success as well.

I matured more with better vision of my goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation tool

Background: Currently, federal requirements mandate that all states implement a 22-question National Young Adults in Transition Database (NYTD) survey with all young adults in foster care at 17, and then again at 19 and 21. States have the option of implementing two more comprehensive versions of NYTD instead of the basic 22-question survey: NYTD Plus Abbreviated (57 questions) and NYTD Plus Full (88 questions). Currently, Nebraska is using the 22-question NYTD survey both with NYTD participants (in accordance with federal requirements) and with young people in B2I (at entry into the program and every 6 months after).

I. We recommend that Nebraska DHHS switch from the 22-question NYTD survey to the NYTD Plus Abbreviated with both populations, and that the survey continue to be administered at the time of entry into the program and every 6 months after. *(Previous recommendation, slightly adjusted.)*
II. We recommend that a public/private partnership be explored to allow a contract with an independent external evaluator for outreach and collection of surveys, as this agency would have more time to dedicate to collecting surveys and could help young people feel more comfortable in answering honestly. Young adults could take the survey by phone, by submitting a written copy via mail, or online. *(Previous recommendation.)*
    a. We recommend that during Year 1 of this contract emphasis be placed on collecting surveys from young adults in the program, with efforts expanding to those not in the program in Year 2. Surveys should continue to be collected from young adults by DHHS per federal guidelines. *(Previous recommendation.)*
    b. We recommend all NYTD responses be stored in a manner that allows the independent external agency to have ongoing and easy access to data. *(Previous recommendation.)*
III. We recommend that random ID numbers be assigned at the time the young person takes the survey to maintain confidentiality. We recommend that DHHS explore whether the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative would be available for technical assistance on this. *(Previous recommendation.)*
IV. We recommend that private funding streams be explored to offer incentives to young people to encourage participation in the survey. We recommend that these incentives by offered in the form of $10 gift cards for young adults in B2I, and that this be expanded to those not in the program when possible. *(Previous recommendation.)*

Fiscal Accountability

I. We recommend that DHHS track all expenditures and provide quarterly reports detailing itemized program service costs and program administrative costs, including, but not limited to, specifics about administrative costs, salaries, training costs (including itemized costs, the cost of materials, the number of attendees at each training, travel costs, and the cost to train the trainers), and staff and supervisor turnover and changes (including the location of staff and supervisors) to the Advisory Committee. This should also include itemized adoption and guardianship costs and the state-extended guardianship assistance program costs. *(Previous recommendation. Note: this recommendation was adopted by DHHS, but no quarterly reports have been submitted to the best of the Evaluation Workgroup's knowledge.)*
II. We recommend that the Advisory Committee review these reports, provide recommendations to DHHS and the Children's Commission if necessary, and include the financial reports and any recommendations made as a part of their annual report to the Children's Commission, HHS Committee of the Legislature, DHHS, and the Governor of the State of Nebraska. *(Previous recommendation.)*

Tracking Supportive Services

I. To ensure young adults are receiving the supportive services they need to guide them to success, case managers should clearly document and track specific services provided in the young adult's transition plan and in reports for case reviews and permanency hearings. *(Previous recommendation, adopted per DHHS.)*
    a. We recommend that the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) continue to review files for young adults in the program to track service provision. We recommend the FCRO include information about how the program is operating and detailed findings regarding the recommendation above in their annual report to the Advisory Committee. *(New recommendation.)*

II. We recommend that judges or hearing officers or both utilize a series of age and developmentally appropriate questions modeled after those in Through the Eyes' Transition Planning Guide or in NRCYD's resource during hearings to ask young adults about their transition plan, services they're receiving, etc. We recommend the Court Improvement Project look into how these hearings are being handled and provide a report to the Advisory Committee following the first year of implementation. *(Previous recommendation, adjusted.)*

Young Adult Satisfaction

I. We recommend that DHHS continue to distribute satisfaction surveys to all young adults leaving the program to assess the reason for leaving and overall satisfaction with the experience. We recommend that these surveys be provided on a quarterly basis to the Advisory Committee. *(Previous recommendation, adjusted.)*
    a. We recommend this survey be provided along with a stamped envelope for young adults to use to return the survey. We recommend a follow-up phone call be made if the survey is not returned in 3 weeks. If the Independence Coordinator is administering the survey in person, we recommend the young adult be provided an envelope to put their survey in when complete, that the young adult seal said survey, and that the survey be provided directly to the individual in charge of tracking satisfaction survey results. *(Previous recommendation, adjusted.)*

II. We recommend that a public/private partnership be explored to allow for an incentive of $10 gift cards for young adults taking the exit survey. *(Previous recommendation.)*

III. We recommend the independent external agency be responsible for collecting these surveys, administering stipends, analyzing results, and developing the annual report to the Advisory Committee. *(Previous recommendation.)*

Public/Private Partnership

I. We recommend private funding and public/private partnerships be explored to support the implementation of these recommendations. *(Previous recommendation.)*

Recommendations Regarding Ongoing Implementation

Background: During the process of information-gathering, the Evaluation and Data Workgroup's attention was drawn to several programmatic concerns regarding the program's current operations. The recommendations below attempt to address, bring to light, and possibly mitigate some of these potential issues.

I. Despite recent legislative changes, some young people in the program are still not currently receiving Medicaid; rather, they are being covered by letters of entitlement, meaning that all medical costs are coming out of the program budget and not Medicaid. As of October 2015, five young people were being covered by these letters. We recommend that all young people in the program (including those under

guardianship) be covered by Medicaid rather than letters of entitlement to ensure the sustainability of the program.
    a. We also recommend NFOCUS be programmed to send notification letters to both young adults and their Independence Coordinators any time a young person in the program is deemed ineligible for Medicaid or when Medicaid verification is needed.

II. Some issues have also been identified with Native young adults being able to access services. For example, young people in the Santee tribe leave the system at 18, and the court order doesn't specify they are being discharged to independent living (which is a required component of eligibility per law). We recommend that potential solutions to this be explored to ensure Native young adults are able to access the program.
    a. One potential solution to this issue – and other issues that have been identified regarding the inclusion of youth involved with the juvenile justice system – currently being discussed by the Juvenile Justice Workgroup is lowering the Bridge to Independence program age to 18. We recommend that the Advisory Committee evaluate the pros, cons, and possible implications of this prior to any final decision. We recommend data be collected from young adults and stakeholders as a part of this process.

III. Should a similar program be created for young adults involved with juvenile justice, we recommend evaluation and data collection processes operate the same as the current Bridge to Independence program, and that the Evaluation and Data Workgroup receive and review program performance data for both groups of young people.

IV. We recommend the Advisory Committee and FCRO look at the role of Independence Coordinators in helping young people budget, determine how best to spend their stipend, access financial management education, etc. We would like to note that financial management should be a core component of the Bridge to Independence program.

V. In addition to the data discussed in the *Current Status* section of this report, we recommend DHHS provide the following data to the Evaluation and Data Workgroup on a biannual basis (in April and October) via an excel spreadsheet of raw, individual-level data, minus identifiable information.
    a. DOB (or current age)
    b. City/zip code/Service Area
    c. Race/ethnicity
    d. Eligibility category
    e. Date of discharge from foster care system (and age of youth, if DOB is not provided)) and reason for discharge (e.g. adoption, guardianship, discharged to independent living, aged out)
    f. Date of application to Bridge to Independence program (and age of youth, if DOB is not provided)
    g. Date Voluntary Services and Support Agreement was signed (and age of youth, if different from above and if DOB is not provided)
    h. NYTD survey results
    i. Date of discharge from the Bridge to Independence program (and age of youth, if DOB is not provided) and reason for discharge (e.g. aged out, terminated due to lack of contact, terminated due to lack of maintaining eligibility [including type of eligibility], etc.)
    j. Whether youth was provided a satisfaction survey upon discharge

Foster Care Review Office
B2i Case Review Report
February 1, 2015 – September 30, 2015

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 program is meeting the needs of young adults who are enrolled in the Bridge to Independence (B2i) program. 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 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. Starting in September 2015 the FCRO began second case reviews of those still enrolled in the program.

As part of the case review process, the FCRO Review Specialist notifies DHHS IC Supervisors of the young adult's cases that will be reviewed during the next month. The IC notifies the young adult and a time is scheduled that best accommodates the young adult. The Review Specialist then meets with the young adult enrolled in the program to gather information and insight as to how the program is working from their 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. It does not appear that the young adult finds the conference call method to be less "friendly", nor do they hold back from participating in a meaningful way in their case review. Young adults are given a choice of a face to face whenever possible and the majority choose to the conference call option as it better fits their busy lifestyle.

This report focuses on the findings and data collected from **91 first** case reviews that occurred from **February 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015**. Data from the second cases that began in September of 2015 are not a part of this report.

Of the initial 91 first case reviews:

- There were 59 (64.8%) females and 32 (35.2%) males.
- Race:
    - White 59 (64.8%)
    - Black 19 (20.9%)
    - Asian 3 (3.3%)
    - American Indian 3 (3.3%)
    - Other or Unknown 7 (7.7%)

- Ethnicity:
    - Hispanic 17 (18.7%)
    - Non-Hispanic 71 (78%)
    - Unknown 3 (3.3%)
- Service Areas:
    - 46 (50.5%) Eastern
    - 25 (27.5%) Southeast
    - 10 (11%) Central
    - 6 (6.6%) Northern
    - 4 (4.4%) Western
- The majority were living in shared (59.3%) or independent (16.5%) housing.
- Of the female population, 16.9% were expecting a child and 26.4% of the females were already parenting at least one child.
- Of the population reviewed, 4 were married, 87 were single.
- Of the young adult reviewed, eligibility at time of entry was listed as:
    - Completing High School 11
    - Post-Secondary Education 38
    - Special Programs 13
    - Employed 80 Hours Per Month 52
    - Medically or DD Incapable 2

  **Some had more than one category checked*.
- Employment:
    - 37.4% were employed full-time
    - 18.7% were employed part-time.
    - 33% were seeking employment at the time of the review.
- Education:
    - 10 (11.0%) were enrolled in high school (4 full-time /6 part-time)
    - 29 (31.9%) were pursuing post-secondary education (25 full-time /4 part-time).

The goal is that B2i data can be used as a longitudinal approach to measuring the progression of the young adult throughout their time in the B2i program. For example: stabilization of their housing; employment; high school completion, and entry into and possible completion of post-secondary education.

It is also envisioned that by looking at areas that the young adult is working on during the ages of 19-20 may lead to the re-examination of the programs and services for youth ages 14 through 18 that are in the foster care system to ensure that those services are developmentally appropriate and aligned with the needs and interests of the youth to better prepare them for their transition to adulthood.

During the first round of B2i many of the young adults had been out of foster care and on their own prior to enrolling in B2i. Those young adults who were age 20 and almost age 21 had a shorter experience with B2i prior to aging out of the program. Some of those enrolled near 21, aged out before they had a case review. Others were just turning 19 and starting their transition into adulthood and will have the full benefit of B2i until they age out at age 21. Over time it may be helpful to look at the various points of entry to see if the young adults have more or less need of specific services. It may also be beneficial to look at the types of services received from providers while living in certain types of placements.

Based our initial case reviews, case plans were written with the young adult's involvement 100% of the time, and NYTD was completed for 90 of the 91 young adults reviewed. Independence Coordinators were found to be meeting with the young adults on a monthly basis as required, 100% of the time.

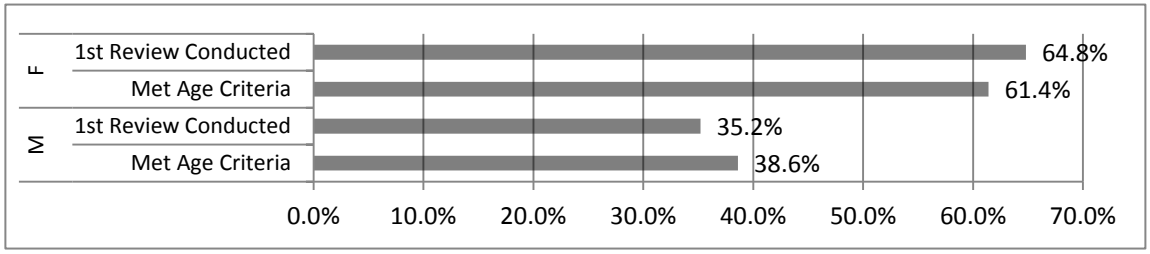
As this program continues and additional data is gathered from second case reviews we will be better able to analyze the data collected to determine what additional goals are focused on, the appropriateness of the goals based on the needs of the young adult, and the how the young adult is progressing in each goal category.

Met Age Criteria to 1st Review Conducted Demographic Comparison

Gender

Met Age Criteria (19 & 20)		
Male	68	38.6%
Female	108	61.4%
Total	176	100%

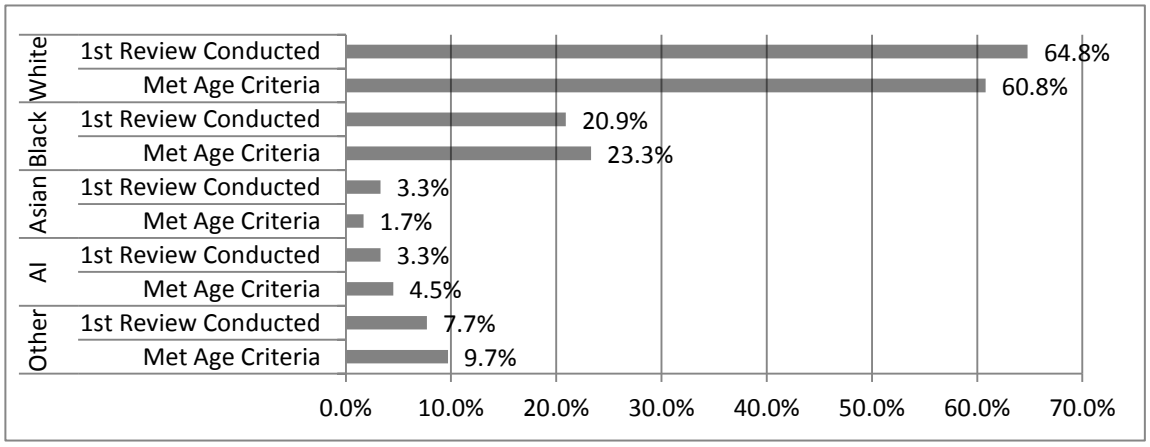
1st Review Conducted		
Male	32	35.2%
Female	59	64.8%
Total	91	100%



Race

Met Age Criteria (19 & 20)		
White	107	60.8%
Black	41	23.3%
Asian	3	1.7%
American Indian	8	4.5%
Other or Unknown	17	9.7%
Total	176	100%

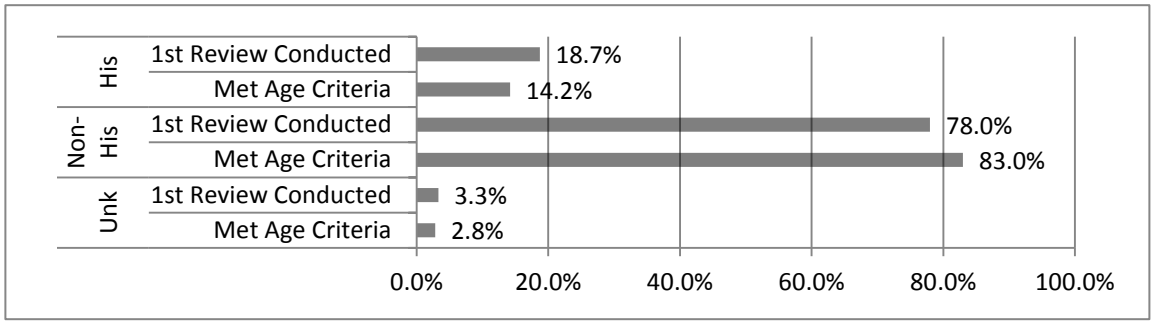
1st Review Conducted		
White	59	64.8%
Black	19	20.9%
Asian	3	3.3%
American Indian	3	3.3%
Other or Unknown	7	7.7%
Total	91	100%



Ethnicity

Met Age Criteria (19 & 20)		
Hispanic	25	14.2%
Non-Hispanic	146	83.0%
Unknown	5	2.8%
Total	176	100%

1st Review Conducted		
Hispanic	17	18.7%
Non-Hispanic	71	78.0%
Unknown	3	3.3%
Total	91	100%



1st Case Review Details (91 Total)

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	59	64.8%
Male	32	35.2%
Total	91	100.0%

IVE	Count	Percent
No	60	65.9%
Yes	23	25.3%
Unknown	8	8.8%
Total	91	100.0%

Marital Status	Count	Percent
Single	87	95.6%
Married	4	4.4%
Total	91	100.0%

Pregnant	Count	Percent
No	49	83.1%
Yes	10	16.9%
Total	59	100.0%

With Children	Count	Percent
No	67	73.6%
Yes	24	26.4%
Total	91	100.0%

Eligibility at Entry	Count
Comp. High School	11
Post-Secondary	38
Special Programs	13
Emp. 80 Hours/Month	52
Med/DD Incapable	2
Total (*Multi. Resp.)	116

Some have more than one eligibility at entry

Service Area	Count	Percent
Eastern	46	50.5%
Southeast	25	27.5%
Central	10	11.0%
Northern	6	6.6%
Western	4	4.4%
Total	91	100.0%

Enrolled in School	Count	Percent
Yes	39	42.9%
- High School	*10*	*11.0%*
-- Full-Time	*4*	*4.4%*
-- Part-Time	*6*	*6.6%*
- Post Secondary	*29*	*31.9%*
-- Full-Time	*25*	*27.5%*
-- Part-Time	*4*	*4.4%*
No	52	57.1%
Total	91	100.0%

Housing Type	Count	Percent
Shared housing	54	59.3%
Independent Housing	15	16.5%
Relative	9	9.9%
Dorm or campus housing	5	5.5%
With parent/guardian	3	3.3%
Couch Surfing	2	2.2%
Foster Home	1	1.1%
Host Homes	1	1.1%
Trans. Housing	1	1.1%
Total	91	100.0%

Employment Status	Count	Percent
Full Time	34	37.4%
Seeking	30	33.0%
Part Time	17	18.7%
Not Seeking	10	11.0%
Total	91	100.0%

The following data has been filtered to only include 1st reviews between 02/01/2015-09/30/2015. Future analysis on subsequent reviews will be provided at a later date.