

Nebraska Children's Commission



Annual Report to the Governor and the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature

November 17, 2015

Submitted Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4207

The Nebraska Children's Commission
Annual Report and Update on Activities

December 1, 2015

The Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission) was created in 2012 by the Nebraska State Legislature to provide a leadership forum for the collaboration in child welfare and juvenile justice reform among the three branches of government and public and private stakeholders at the state, regional, and community levels and devise a strategic plan for child welfare and juvenile justice. The Commission is required to submit an annual report of its activities as per LB87 (2015). It is the intent of the Commission that this document serves not only as a report of activities, but also as a meaningful and thoughtful contribution to the continued reform and improvement of Nebraska's child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Commission History

The Nebraska Children's Commission was created as a result of LR37, an investigation by the Health and Human Services Committee that identified a number of gaps in the service delivery model for children and families. LR37 evaluated and assessed the effects of child welfare reform started in 2009 by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

One of LR37's many significant findings was that a lack of clear vision and overarching planning for the provision of services for children has created a fragmented system. Nebraska, like many states, had implemented a number of child welfare and child abuse initiatives. These initiatives lacked a long term coordinated plan, and did not achieve true reform. To help remedy this problem, the legislature created the Nebraska Children's Commission to serve as a leadership body for child welfare and juvenile justice, and to create a statewide strategic plan for child welfare and juvenile justice reform.

2015 Activities

The Commission is now in its fourth year and continues to work on the original charges as provided by LB821, responsibilities added by subsequent legislation, and strategic plan priorities. Some highlights from the year include:

- In January members met for the Commission's first annual retreat featuring a presentation on leadership from Senator Colby Coash, information regarding the utilization of data enhance the child welfare system from Chapin Hall's Jennifer Haight, and a facilitated discussion to reaffirm the Commission's direction and focus. The Commission will continue to hold an annual retreat.

- In July the Commission experienced a change in leadership when Beth Baxter became Chair, Gene Klein became Vice-Chair, and Karen Authier moved into the role of Past Chair.
- The Commission released the Child Welfare Financing Primer, a document intended to inform thoughtful discussion about child welfare funding in Nebraska.
- New voting member Paula Wells was welcomed in the role of foster parent. Matthew Blomstedt (Commissioner of Education) designee Steve Milliken, Katie McLeese Stephenson (Court representative), Courtney Phillips (CEO of the Department of Health and Human Services), and Doug Weinberg (Director of Children and Family Services) were also welcomed as ex-officio members. Senator Kate Bolz (Appropriations Committee) and Senator Patty Pansing-Brooks (Judiciary Committee) also joined as legislative representatives. A list of current membership is attached as [Appendix A](#).
- The Commission expanded its knowledge and familiarity with the communities and initiatives of Nebraska by holding meetings outside of the usual meeting location in Lincoln, including Omaha and Grand Island.
- Significant progress was made on the Commission's website, accessible at <http://childrens.nebraska.gov>.

Committees

The Commission completes some of its assigned tasks through Committees created by legislation. The Commission appoints members to ensure that each Committee has a balanced membership representing all three branches of government, system stakeholders, community representatives, and families and youth whose lives have been impacted by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Committees complete their work and forward recommendations to the Commission for approval and advancement to the Legislature, Governor's Office, and DHHS.

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee (Mary Jo Pankoke, Chair)

Statutory Information: This Committee was created by LB216 (2013) and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §473-4513 to make recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Commission regarding the Bridge to Independence Program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance.

The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee has been meeting since July 2013 to make recommendations regarding the creation of a program offering voluntary services and support for youth who have aged out of foster care before attaining permanency. This program was implemented on October 1, 2014, and the Committee continues to monitor the program and make recommendations for improvement.

This Committee has also focused its attention on youth served in the juvenile justice-system. Recognizing that this population needs similar supports and services, a workgroup was formed to examine the possibility of implementing a similar program to serve these youth. The workgroup has consulted with a national firm to perform an analysis of the program's potential fiscal impact.

Priority Recommendations/Focus:

1. The Committee will continue to focus on monitoring the implementation of B2i in partnership with DHHS, the Foster Care Review Office, and other stakeholders to create recommendations for improvement to the B2i program.
2. Support the Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force's recommendation to expand the B2i program to the juvenile justice population, by allowing the 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 to voluntarily enroll in the B2i program.

See [Appendix B](#) for full *Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee* report.

Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee (FCRRC) (Peg Harriott, Chair)

Statutory Information: This Committee was created by LB530 (2013) and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4217 to make recommendations on foster care reimbursement rates, statewide standardized level of care assessment, and adoption assistance payments.

The Committee submitted final recommendations regarding implementation of a new rate structure, and level of care assessment tools in May 2014. The Committee continues meeting to monitor the rate implementation and complete other tasks requested by the Commission and DHHS.

The FCRRC created the Level of Care Subcommittee (now called the Level of Responsibility Workgroup) to create a tool to identify the level of care needed by the child, and identify the responsibilities of the caregiver to ensure the child receives the appropriate level of care to address his/her needs. The Level of Responsibility workgroup has resumed meeting to refine and revise this tool, the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibilities Tool (NCR). The workgroup has identified a number of proposed changes to the tool, including changing the name to reflect the purpose of the tool, including information about transportation responsibilities, and language from the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act regarding the reasonable and prudent parent standard.

The Foster Care Rates Subcommittee has also resumed meeting to examine the efficacy of the current foster care reimbursement rates that became effective of July 1, 2014. Members include representatives from agencies that administer the rates, DHHS, lead agency

Nebraska Families Collaborative, and Probation and a representative of the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Family Association (NFAPA). This group will work to advance recommendations to the FCRRRC on any potential changes that should be made to the base rates. Work includes a review of agency policies surrounding transportation, foster parent reimbursement structures in other states, and information on child raising costs from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

DHHS requested that the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee unbundle the group home rates for purposes of Title IV-E compliance. The Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee convened the Group Home Rate Sub-Committee to perform this task with membership representation from group home providers, DHHS and Probation. The Group Home Rate Subcommittee completed the task to the satisfaction of DHHS. The FCRRRC and Commission requested that the subcommittee continue to meet to calculate the actual costs of providing group home services utilizing the same methodology used to unbundle the rates. The Subcommittee completed this task, and the final report is attached. In addition to its assigned tasks, the subcommittee also provided a forum for group home providers to share information about policies and practices with the intent of improving the effectiveness of group home care. The FCRRRC received an additional assignment at the November 2015 Commission meeting to use the existing work to create recommendations for out of home care options with a rate structure that includes expectations regarding treatment components that would be adequate to serve children for whom placement currently is problematic

Priority Recommendations/Focus:

1. There is a need for the issue of group home care to be looked at further through a legislative review, in order to measure the quality of care, cost of care, and performance outcomes. Identifying the acuity of children and youth served is important when considering outcome based performance measures.
2. The FCRRRC is focused on creating recommendations on foster care reimbursement rates and the statewide standardized level of care assessment for its report to the legislature in 2016.

See [Appendix C](#) for full FCRRRC update and Group Home Subcommittee Report.

Juvenile Services Committee (Nicole Brundo and Kim Hawekotte, Co-Chairs)

Statutory Information: Created by LB821(2012) and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4203, this Committee examines the structure and responsibilities of the Office of Juvenile Services and makes recommendations related to the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTC's) and the juvenile justice system of care.

The Juvenile Services Committee has remained highly active with monthly meetings after submitting its Phase I Strategic Recommendations in 2013. The Committee structured its work in 2015 by thoroughly reviewing its Phase I Plan and delving more deeply into the report's priority topics to create the recommendations in the 2015 Report.

The Committee focused on its recommendation to transition Nebraska's juvenile justice system to a regional model. The Director and Deputy Director of Missouri's Division of Youth Services traveled to Nebraska to provide consultation and information about Missouri's regional juvenile justice model. The Committee is utilizing the insight provided from this presentation to inform their recommendations to implement changes necessary to transition to a regional model.

Priority Recommendations/Focus:

1. The Committee has created a Data Analysis and Mapping Taskforce ("Taskforce") to create recommendations related to the process of moving to a regional system. The Taskforce has representation from the Office of Juvenile Services, Probation, the Foster Care Review Office, and the Juvenile Justice Institute at the University of Nebraska – Omaha. The first meeting of the Taskforce will take place on December 8, 2015, and will report to the full Committee at its January meeting.
2. The Committee will use the information identified by the Data Analysis and Mapping Taskforce to create recommendations regarding a pilot site for a regional facility, to determine the type of youth to be served, the kinds of programs to be offered, and the intake requirements. Potential populations to be served at this pilot site include the population of juvenile justice system involved youth who are receiving treatment out of state, youth who are committed to a YRTC at the age of 18, or another population identified by the Taskforce.
3. As additional legislative bills are introduced to continue or restructure the juvenile justice reform efforts, the Committee will provide feedback and recommendations to the Nebraska Children's Commission and Judiciary Committee of the Legislature.

See [Appendix D](#) for full Juvenile Services (OJS) Committee Report.

Psychotropic Medication Committee (Candy Kennedy-Goergen, Chair)

Statutory Information: The Psychotropic Medication Committee was established by LB821 (2012) and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4203(2)(a) to examine state policy regarding the psychotropic drugs prescribed for children who are wards of the state and administration of such drugs to such children.

The Committee recommended a framework based on the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry's *Position Statement of Oversight of Psychotropic Medication Use for*

Children in State Custody: A Best Principles Guideline of policies and procedures for children receiving psychotropic medications in the Commission's 2012 Phase I Strategic Plan. Additionally, the Committee was authorized by the Commission in 2014 to provide guidance to research and assess practices for prescribing psychotropic medications to children and adolescents living in Nebraska.

The Psychotropic Medications Committee has resumed meeting with the intention of reviewing the policies and procedures of administering psychotropic drugs to state wards and providing guidance on psychotropic medication research protocols. The Committee receives updates from the Department on the implementation of policy and procedure designed to provide oversight and monitoring for the utilization of psychotropic medications in children who are state wards.

Priority Recommendations/Focus:

1. Continue to support DHHS's implementation of the Commission's approved framework for the utilization of psychotropic medication for children who are state wards.
2. Continue to partner with Nebraska's universities to support and provide guidance on psychotropic medication research protocols.

Workgroups

The Nebraska Children's Commission was charged with the statutory duty of creating a statewide strategic plan for child welfare and service reform under Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4204. The Commission created four workgroups to create recommendations to further the goals identified in the Phase I Strategic Plan. Each is chaired by a Commission member and provides regular updates and reports to the Commission on the workgroup's progress toward its strategic plan goals.

Community Ownership of Child Well-Being (Mary Jo Pankoke, Chair)

Strategic Plan Goal: Encourage timely access to effective services through community ownership of child well-being.

The Community Ownership of Child Well-Being workgroup has been meeting regularly and working diligently on a number of important topics, including creating common criteria for evidence based and informed practices, inventorying evidence based programs in Nebraska, and identifying existing community collaboration efforts to enhance efforts and reduce duplication. The group put forth a vision for a state level collective impact group, and recommended the Commission recognize the Prevention Partnership as that group focused on improving the well-being of children. The Commission approved the Prevention Partnership as this body at the May 2015 meeting. In 2013, the workgroup held a number

of listening sessions across the state to learn about the ongoing child well-being activities in communities and how the Commission could support their work. The workgroup will also hold another round of community listening sessions in Fremont, Omaha, Sarpy County, Lincoln, Grand Island, North Platte, and the Panhandle region to obtain information from communities that are implementing Community Response to obtain data on the results and how it is coordinated with Alternative Response.

Priority Recommendations/Focus:

1. Establish a clear understanding of how successful prevention efforts across the state support the Alternative Response Program.
2. Document successful prevention efforts underway in communities across the state.
 - a. The workgroup has provided an inventory of evidence based programs in communities that have implemented Alternative Response (attached to workgroup report).
 - b. The workgroup is working with the Prevention Partnership to identify existing community collaboration efforts, categorized by community, county, system and outcome.

See [Appendix E](#) for full *Community Ownership of Child Well-Being* report.

Data, Technology, Accountability and Reporting (DTAR) (David Newell, Chair)

Strategic Plan Goal: Utilize technological solutions to information exchange and ensure measured results across systems of care.

The Data, Technology, Accountability and Reporting Workgroup has been meeting to work towards the statutory duty to identify the type of information needed for a clear and thorough analysis of progress on child welfare indicators as per Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4204(1)(d). Formerly the IT Workgroup, the group reviewed its role in the Commission and renewed its focus after a report to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature providing information on three categories of promising technological solutions: case management software, data warehouse, and predictive analytics software. The group has collaborated with Chapin Hall to bring presentations on the use of data in child welfare and juvenile justice to the Commission.

Priority Recommendations/Focus:

1. Data transparency and comparability promotes ongoing quality improvement in child welfare. The following steps should be undertaken to support ongoing quality improvement:
 - a. Nebraska should make the Nebraska Foster Care Profile and Hot Spot reports produced by Chapin Hall publically available as soon as possible.

- b. Nebraska should increase the amount of juvenile justice data available to stakeholders and the public. The measures necessary to monitor the juvenile justice system should be determined and made widely and publically available.
- c. Support Nebraska's migration from the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Round 2 measures to the CFSR Round 3 measures (or closest proxies) as soon as possible and make plans to sunset the use of CFSR Round 2 measures.

System of Care (Gene Klein, Chair)

Strategic Plan Goal: Support a family driven, child focused, and flexible system of care through transparent system collaboration with shared partnerships and ownership.

The System of Care Workgroup has remained active in the Division of Behavioral Health's Design for a Nebraska System of Care (SOC) Planning Project. The workgroup continues to advocate moving forward with the implementation of the project.

The Workgroup also continues to support the implementation of the Division of Children and Family Services' Alternative Response Project. Most recently System of Care Workgroup Chair and Commission Vice Chair Gene Klein provided public comment on the Alternative Response regulations to support the Department's implementation of the program. The Commission will provide feedback on the Department's report on the Alternative Response evaluation as per Neb. Rev. Stat. §28-712(1) with the assistance of the System of Care Workgroup.

Priority Recommendations/Focus:

1. The System of Care Workgroup's priority is to partner with DHHS in its implementation and continued improvement of Alternative Response. The workgroup looks forward to working with DHHS to provide feedback following the Alternative Response evaluation report.
2. An additional priority is to support the implementation of the Division of Behavioral Health's Design for a Nebraska System of Care (SOC) Planning Project.

Workforce (Susan Staab, Chair)

Strategic Plan Goal: Foster a consistent, stable, skilled workforce serving children and families.

The Workforce Workgroup recognizes the critical importance of caseworkers to achieving safety, permanency, and well-being for children in Nebraska. The group developed a report with recommendations related to the recruitment and retention of quality caseworkers. This

continued the work done by the group in 2014 to identify the priority areas to achieve its strategic plan goal. DHHS and lead agency Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC) presented information to the Commission following the workgroup's report regarding their efforts to recruit and retain skilled caseworkers. The Commission and workgroup support DHHS and lead agency NFC's continued efforts to professionalize and enhance the role of caseworker in the child welfare system. The workgroup has additionally identified a need to increase the number of caseworker and supervisor candidates with Bachelor and Master Degrees in social work.

Priority Recommendations and Focus:

1. The Workforce Workgroup continues to support its two key focus areas to recruit and retain child welfare workers in Nebraska: increased salary and compensation, and the development of career trajectories.
2. Examine ways to increase the number of candidates with Bachelor and Master of Social Work degrees in the child welfare workforce, including:
 - a. Continuing to explore financial incentives for attaining a Master of Social Work degree, such as a salary differential for attaining higher education, tuition reimbursement or loan forgiveness programs, and
 - b. Stakeholder partnership with Nebraska's Schools of Social Work to increase capacity in building a child welfare workforce with social work education through long term investment and collaboration.
3. Examine the possibility of requiring all child welfare case managers and supervisors to have degrees from accredited schools of social work, with the understanding that this would require a long term plan of investment in and partnership with Nebraska's universities.

The full report of the Workforce Workgroup is attached as [Appendix C](#) of the Lead Agency Taskforce Report.

Taskforces

The Commission has created taskforces to create recommendations on limited scope issues that do not fall within existing Committees or Workgroups.

Lead Agency Taskforce (Beth Baxter, Chair)

Statutory Information: The Commission was charged by LB821 and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4204 with creating recommendations relating to the potential of contracting with not for profit entities as lead agencies.

The Commission convened a group of stakeholders to have a series of thoughtful conversations about what an ideal child welfare system should look like, and the potential

role of a lead agency within that system. The taskforce created a report setting forth the seven components of a seamless system of care necessary for any child welfare agency, public or private, to effectively serve children and families. The report included recommendations on the potential role of a private agency within the ideal seamless system of care. The Lead Agency Taskforce is not currently active, but is awaiting the further direction of the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature and Governor's Office, and remains willing to resume work in support of a successful child welfare system.

Priority Recommendations and Focus:

1. The Lead Agency Taskforce believes that the lead agency model can be effective if the seven components of a seamless system of care are present: (1) Outcomes and Accountability; (2) Clarification of Roles and Responsibility; (3) Quality Case Management Workforce; (4) Trust; (5) Adaptive and Individualized to Children, Families, and Communities; (6) Coordinated and Flexible Service Delivery Model; and (7) Single Data Repository/Warehouse.
2. Those in authority for determining whether lead agencies will be utilized should consider the broader issues of whether or not Nebraska should establish contracts that delegate child welfare responsibilities. The State remains responsible for the placement and care of children who are state wards when lead agencies are utilized.
3. Case managers and supervisors are the foundation of the child welfare system. If the foundation of case workers and supervisors is built, the State will have a strong child welfare system regardless of the structure.

See [Appendix F](#) for full Lead Agency Taskforce Report.

Legal Parties Taskforce (Kim Hawekotte, Chair)

Issue: The Commission formed this group to examine and make recommendations related to legal parties and the practice of law in the Juvenile Court.

This Taskforce was initially formed to begin its examination of legal parties with Guardians ad Litem charged with representing the best interests of children involved in child welfare cases following LR542 examining issues regarding the current Guardian ad Litem system and report from the Office of the Auditor of Public Accounts on the Douglas County Juvenile Court Guardian ad Litem System. The Taskforce thoroughly examined the role of the Guardian ad Litem in Nebraska and other states to create recommendations to the Judiciary Committee of the Legislature, some of which were codified in LB15 (2015).

Since submitting these recommendations, the Taskforce has continued working to elevate and professionalize the practice of law in the Juvenile Court and is in the process of creating presentations for court stakeholders on recent juvenile law practice related legislation.

Priority Recommendations and Focus:

1. Continue enhancing the professionalism of the legal parties within juvenile court through the evaluation of the roles and responsibilities of legal parties.
2. Encourage professionalism and attainment of competencies in the practice of juvenile law by:
 - a. Increasing the amount of juvenile practice specific trainings available to legal parties and other system stakeholders,
 - b. Encouraging the Supreme Court of Nebraska to require dedicated Continuing Legal Education (CLE) hours for all legal parties who practice in juvenile court, and
 - c. Researching the legal education in law schools provided to students with interest in pursuing careers in juvenile practice.
3. Research and evaluate the prosecutorial models of Nebraska and other jurisdictions.
4. Research and evaluate solutions to the problems posed by conflicting jurisdiction between the district and juvenile courts, including the feasibility of implementing a unified family court system in Nebraska or codification of the holding of *In Re Stephanie H.*, 10 Neb. App. 908, 639 N.W.2d 668 (2002).
5. Review data regarding the timeliness of adjudication hearings and appeal process in Nebraska, and other states' processes for possible improvement.

Strengthening Families Act Implementation Taskforce (Katie McLeese-Stephenson and Sarah Helvey, Co-Chairs)

Issue: The Commission formed this group to make recommendations related to the implementation of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (“Strengthening Families Act”).

This group was created at the November 17, 2015, Commission meeting to act as an advisory body as the “normalcy” provisions of the Strengthening Families Act are implemented in Nebraska. This group will create recommendations surrounding the provisions that support youth in foster care to engage in normal childhood activities, such as sleepovers, extracurricular activities, sports participation, sleep-away camp, and other pro-social activities that encourage healthy development. Membership will be populated by a stakeholder group with background and expertise in the Strengthening Families Act. As this group was created in November of 2015, work has only just begun to establish its priorities and focus.

Nebraska Children's Commission Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Location	Representation
Vacant	Voting		Guardian Ad Litem
Vacant	Voting		Court Appointed Special Advocate Volunteer
Teresa Anderson	Voting	Hastings	Community Representative - Central Service Area
Karen Authier (Past Chair)	Voting	Omaha	Child Welfare Service Agency
Beth Baxter (Chair)	Voting	Kearney	Administrator of a Behavior Health Region
Holly Brandt	Voting	Scottsbluff	Community Representative - Western Service Area
Jennifer Chrystal-Clark	Voting	Omaha	Prosecuting Attorney Who Practices in Juvenile Court
Kim Hawekotte	Voting	Lincoln	Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office
Candy Kennedy-Goergen	Voting	Upland	Biological Parent Currently Or Previously Involved In The Child Welfare System
Gene Klein (Vice Chair)	Voting	Omaha	Director of a Child Advocacy Center
Andrea Miller	Voting	Scottsbluff	Representative of a federally recognized Indian tribe residing within the State of Nebraska
David Newell	Voting	Omaha	Community Representative - Eastern Service Area
Deb O'Brien	Voting	Lincoln	Member of a Local Foster Care Review Board
Mary Jo Pankoke	Voting	Lincoln	Representative Of A Child Advocacy Organization
Dale Shotkoski	Voting	Fremont	Community Representative - Northern Service Area
Susan Staab	Voting	Lincoln	Community Representative - Southeast Service Area
Diana Tedrow	Voting	Bennington	Young Adult previously in Foster Care
Paula Wells	Voting	Ashland	Foster Parent
Steve Milliken	Ex-Officio (Alternate)	Lincoln	Designee of the Commissioner of the Department of Education (alternate for when Blomstedt is unavailable)
Matthew Blomstedt	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Commissioner of the Department of Education
Sen. Kate Bolz	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Designee of the Chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the Legislature

Nebraska Children's Commission Membership

Ellen Brokofsky	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Sen. Kathy Campbell	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Chairperson of the HHS Committee of the Legislature
Katie McLeese Stephenson	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Designee of the Chairperson of the Judiciary Committee of the Legislature
Courtney Phillips	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	CEO of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Judge Linda Porter	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Julie Rogers	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare
Doug Weinberg	Ex-Officio	Lincoln	Director of Children and Family Services division of DHHS

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



Bridge to Independence

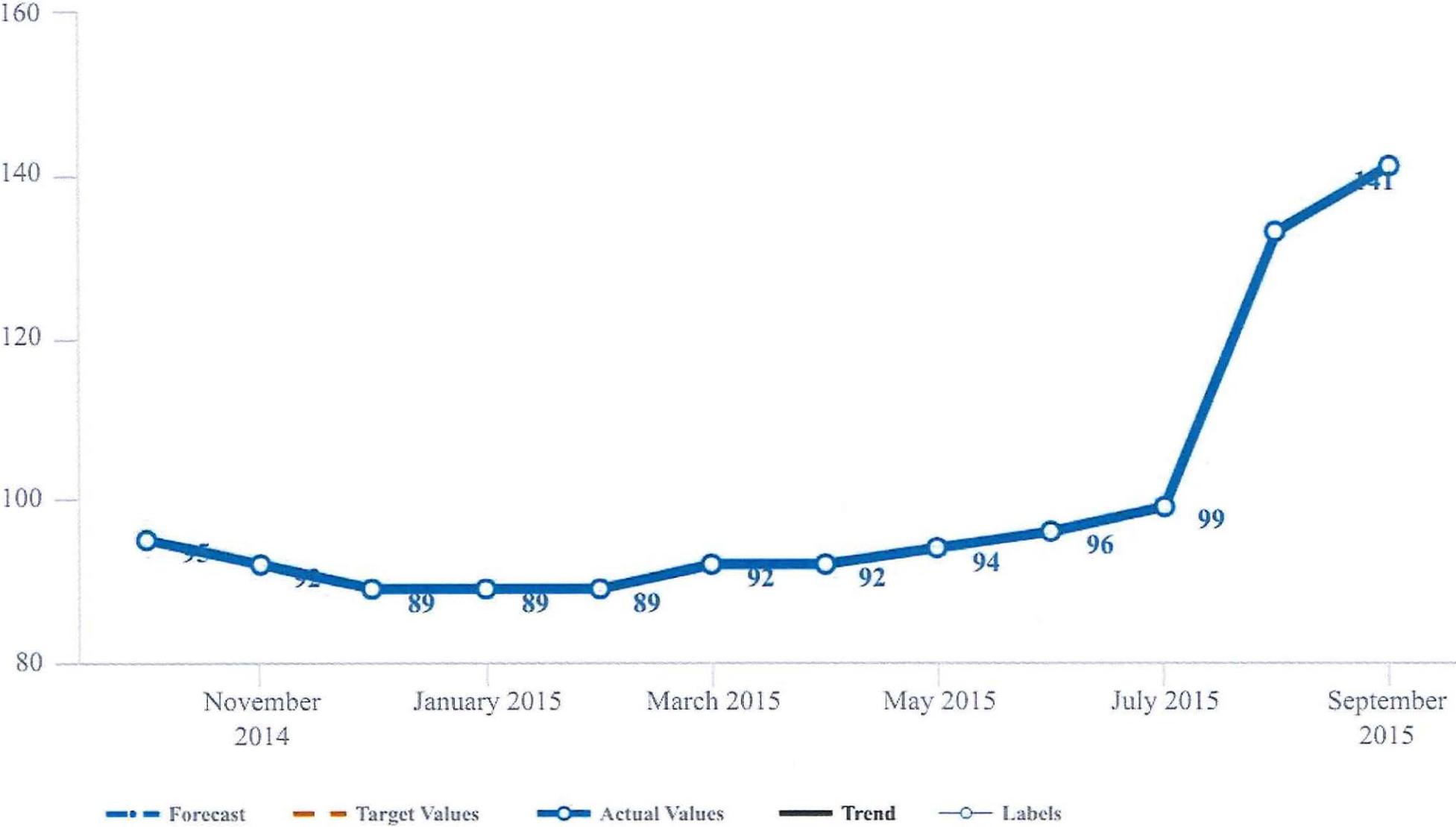
P Bridge to Independence

		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 initiated 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-Employe	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.



Number of participating youth out-of-state.



Number of pregnant / expecting enrollees.



Number of terminations initiated by DHHS within the last month.



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



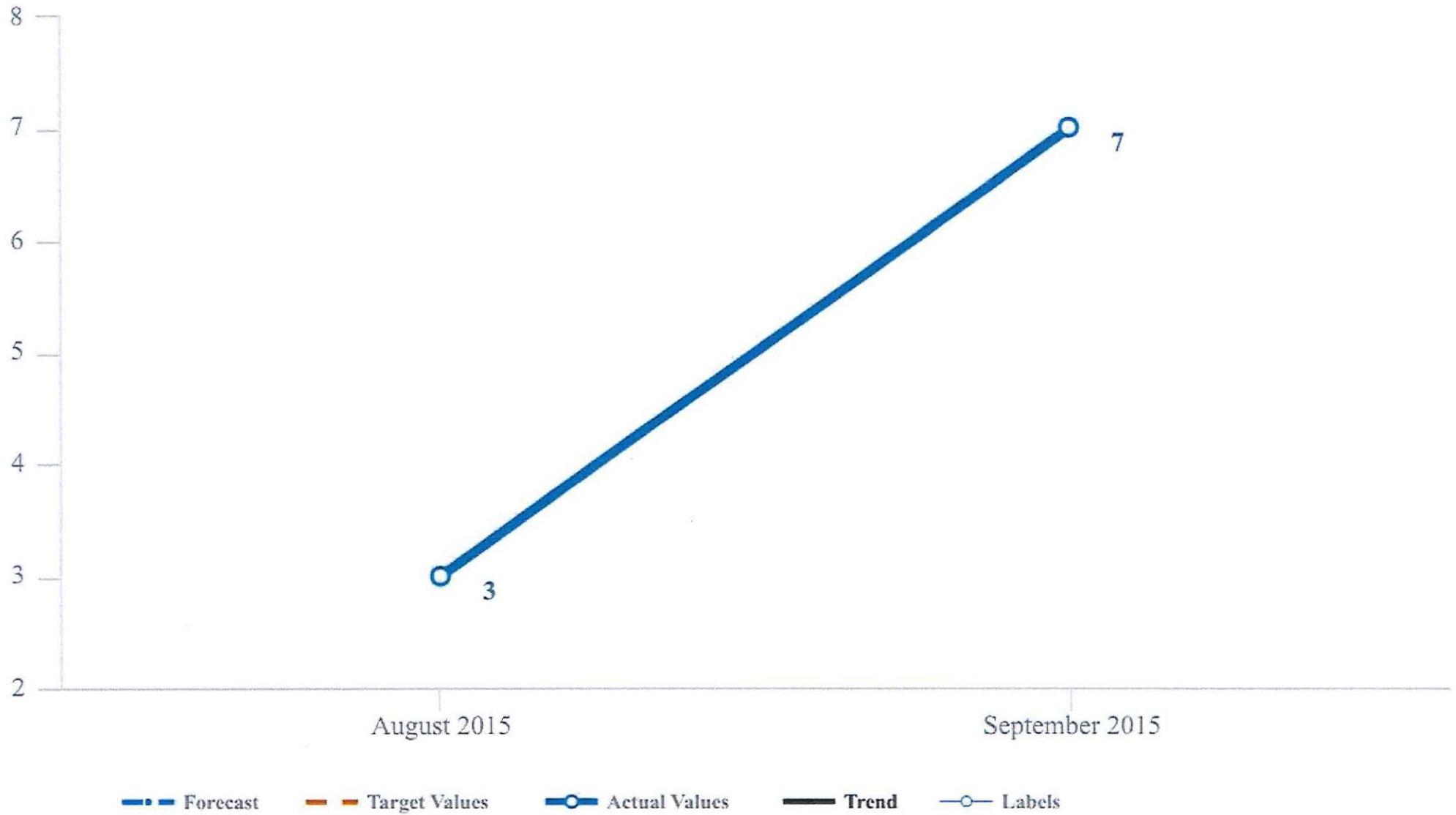
Number of young adults graduating from the program within the last thirty days.



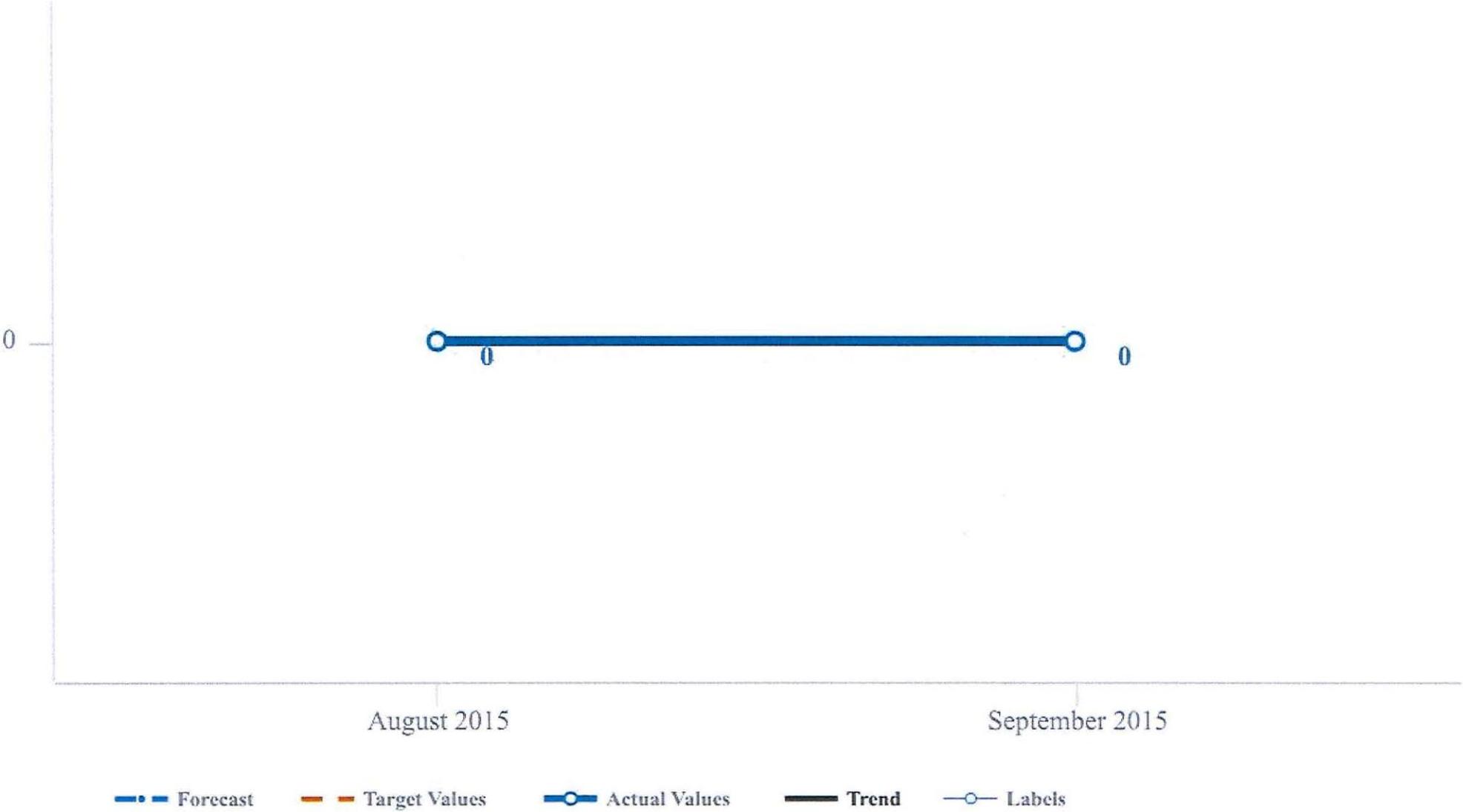
Number of young adults who applied for the Bridge to Independence Program within the last thirty days.



Number of young adults who are "couch surfing".



Number of young adults who are in a shelter.



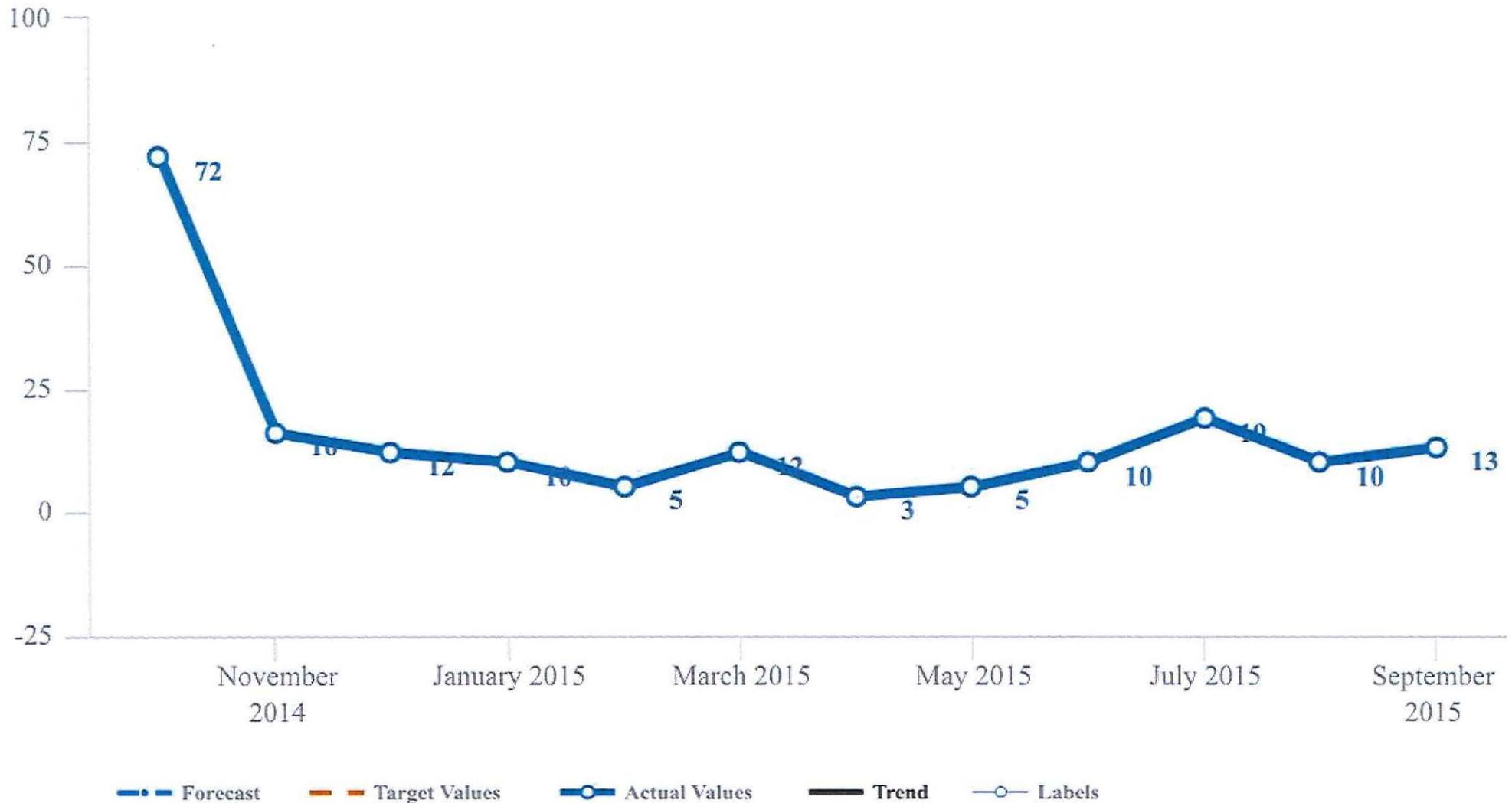
Number of young adults who had a mental health diagnosis while a State Ward



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



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



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



Number of youth with a Letter of Entitlement

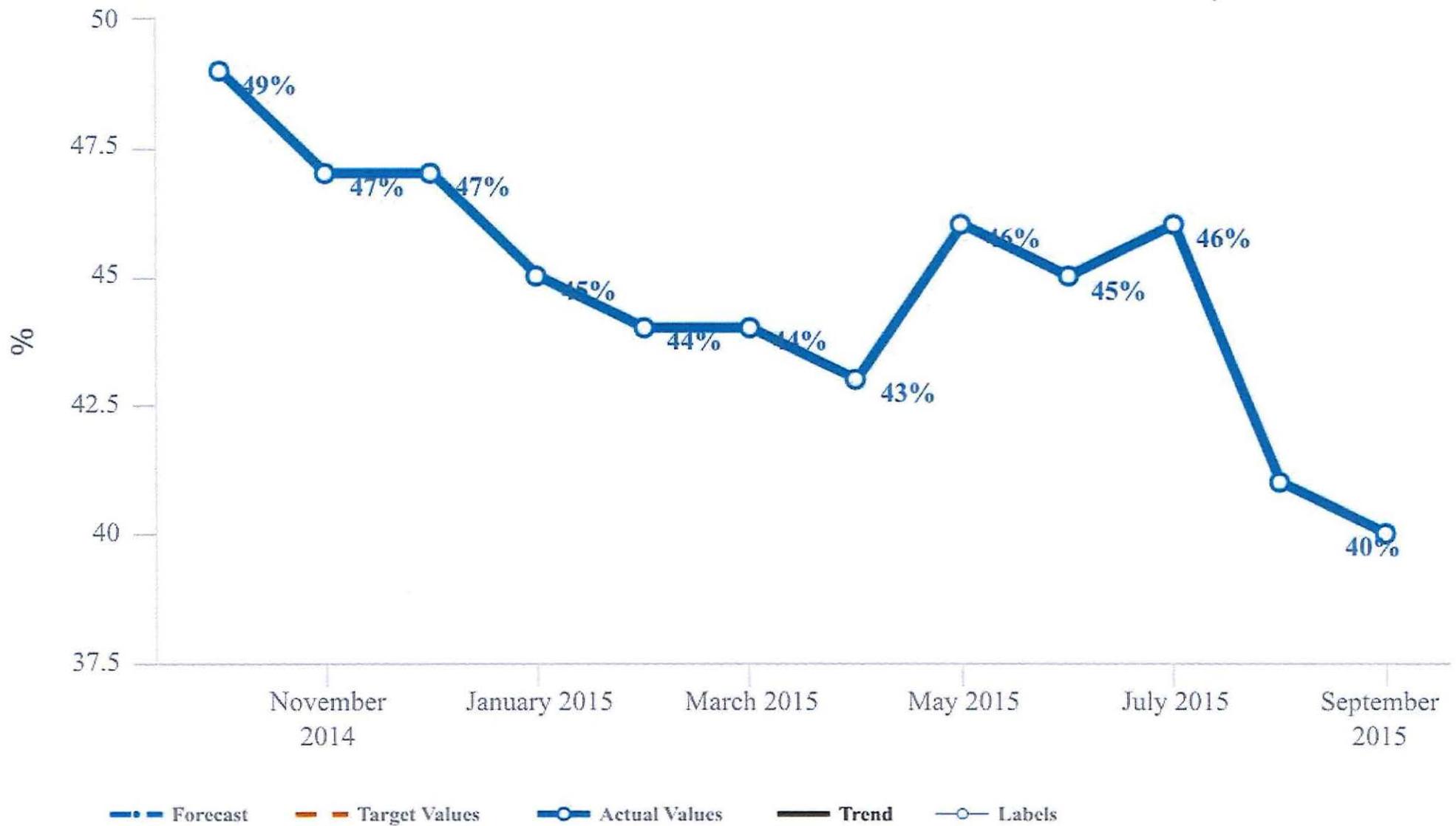


Forecast Target Values Actual Values Trend Labels

Percentage of enrollees in ESA and NSA.



Percentage of enrollees in SESA, CSA and WSA.



Percentage of females enrolled.



Percentage of males enrolled.



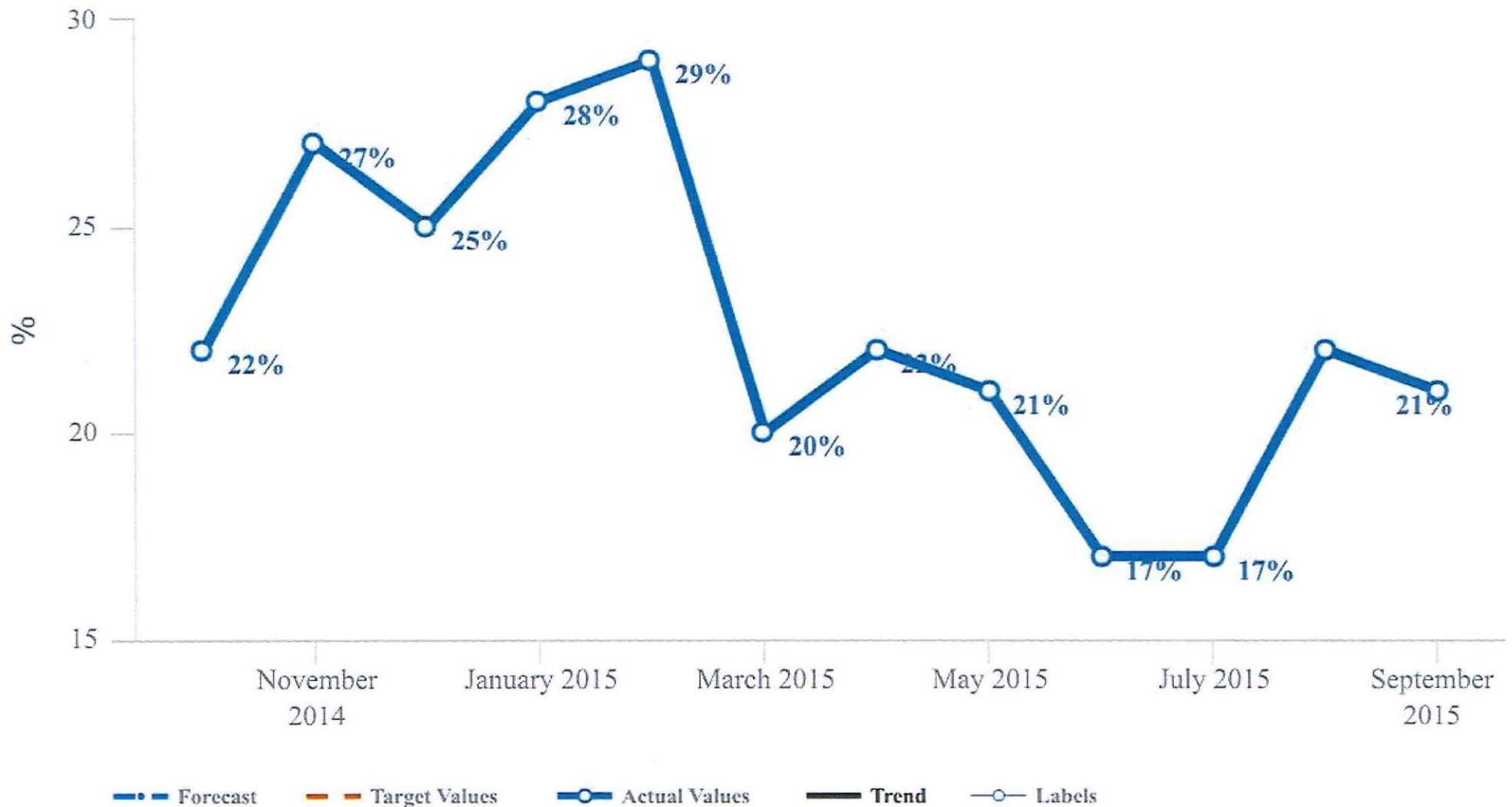
Percentage of young adults meeting the educational requirement within the last month.



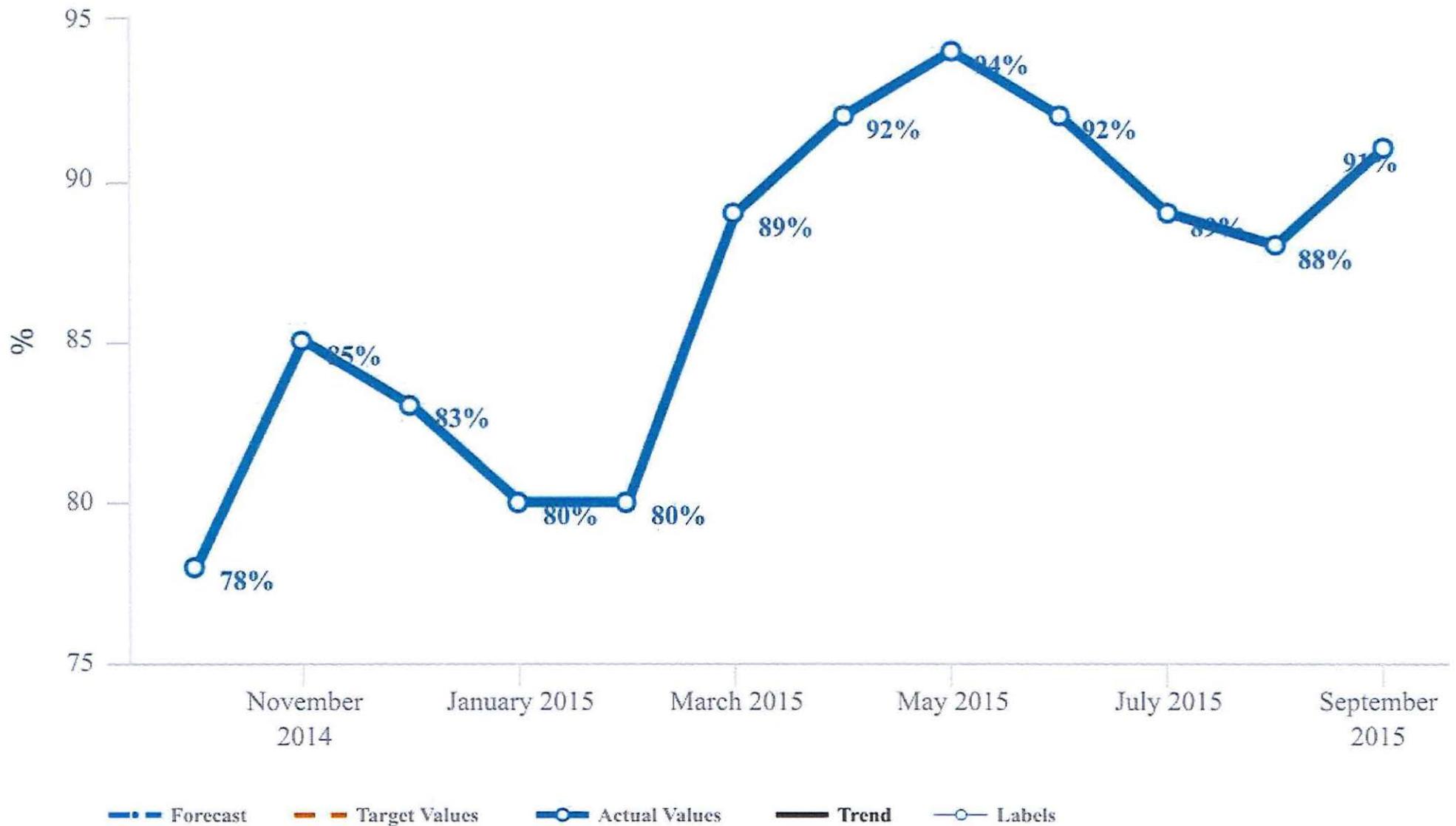
Percentage of young adults meeting the employment requirement within the last month.



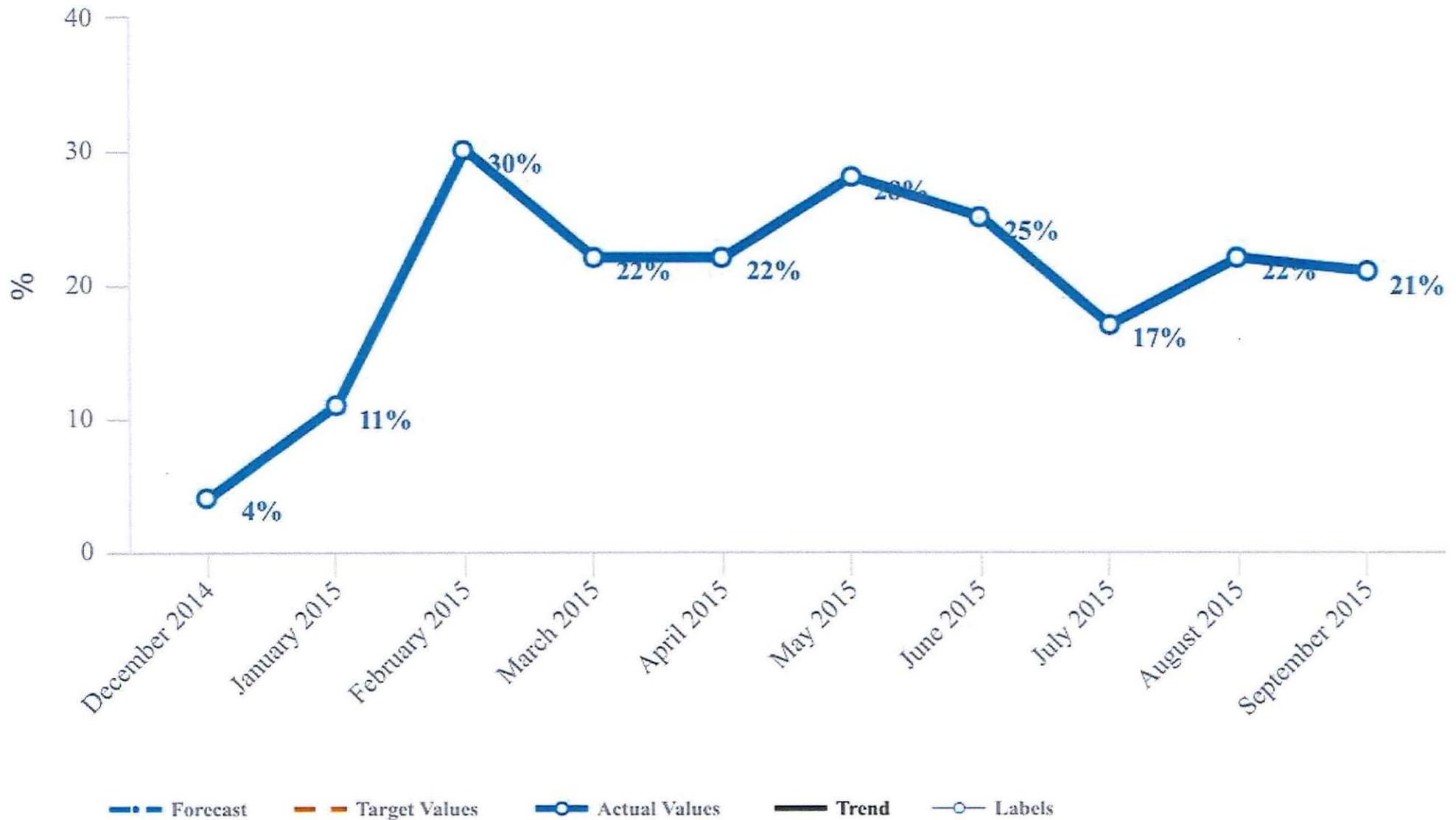
Percentage of young adults participating in the Program to Remove Barriers to Employment



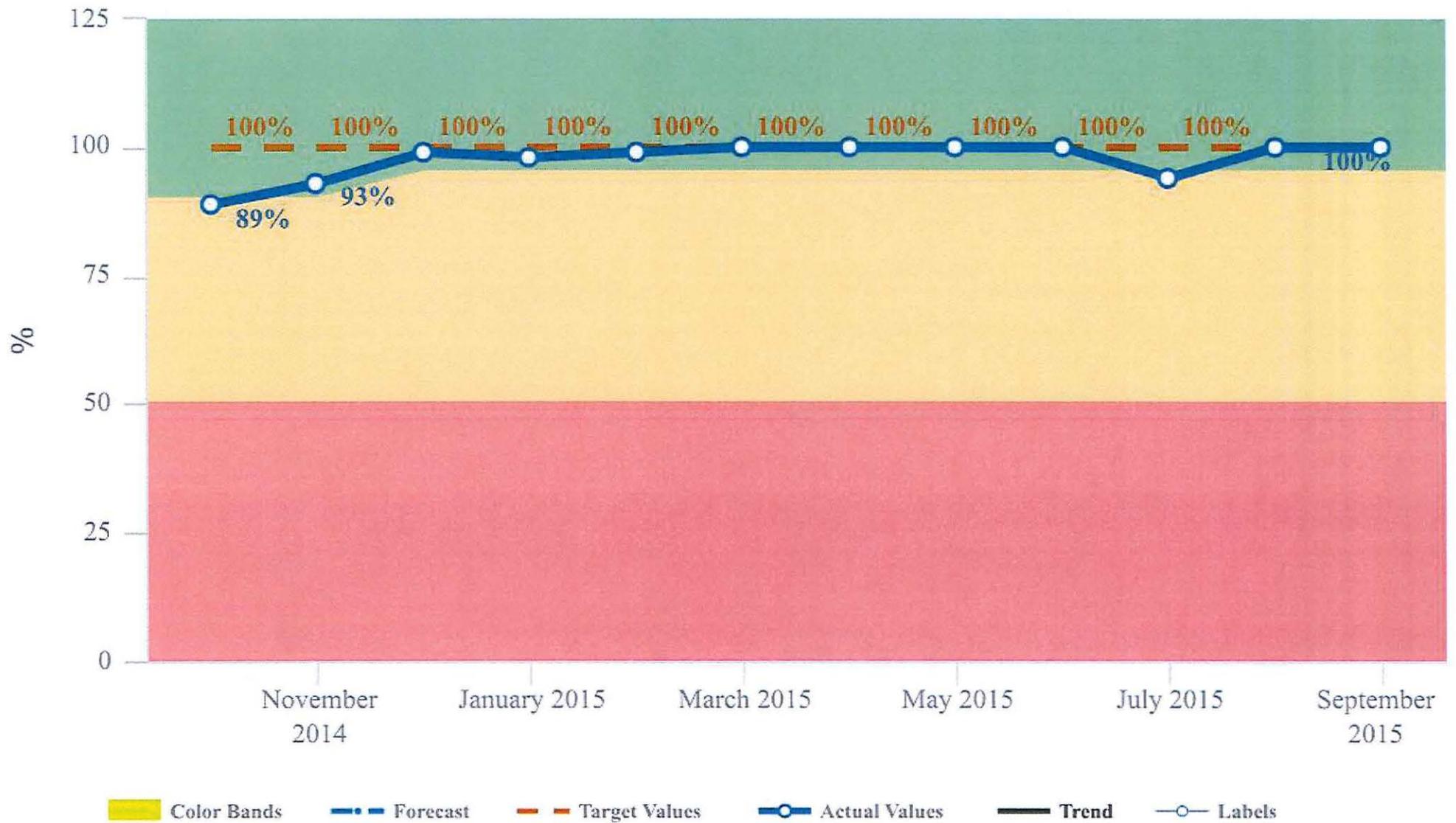
Percentage of young adults receiving Medicaid within the last month.



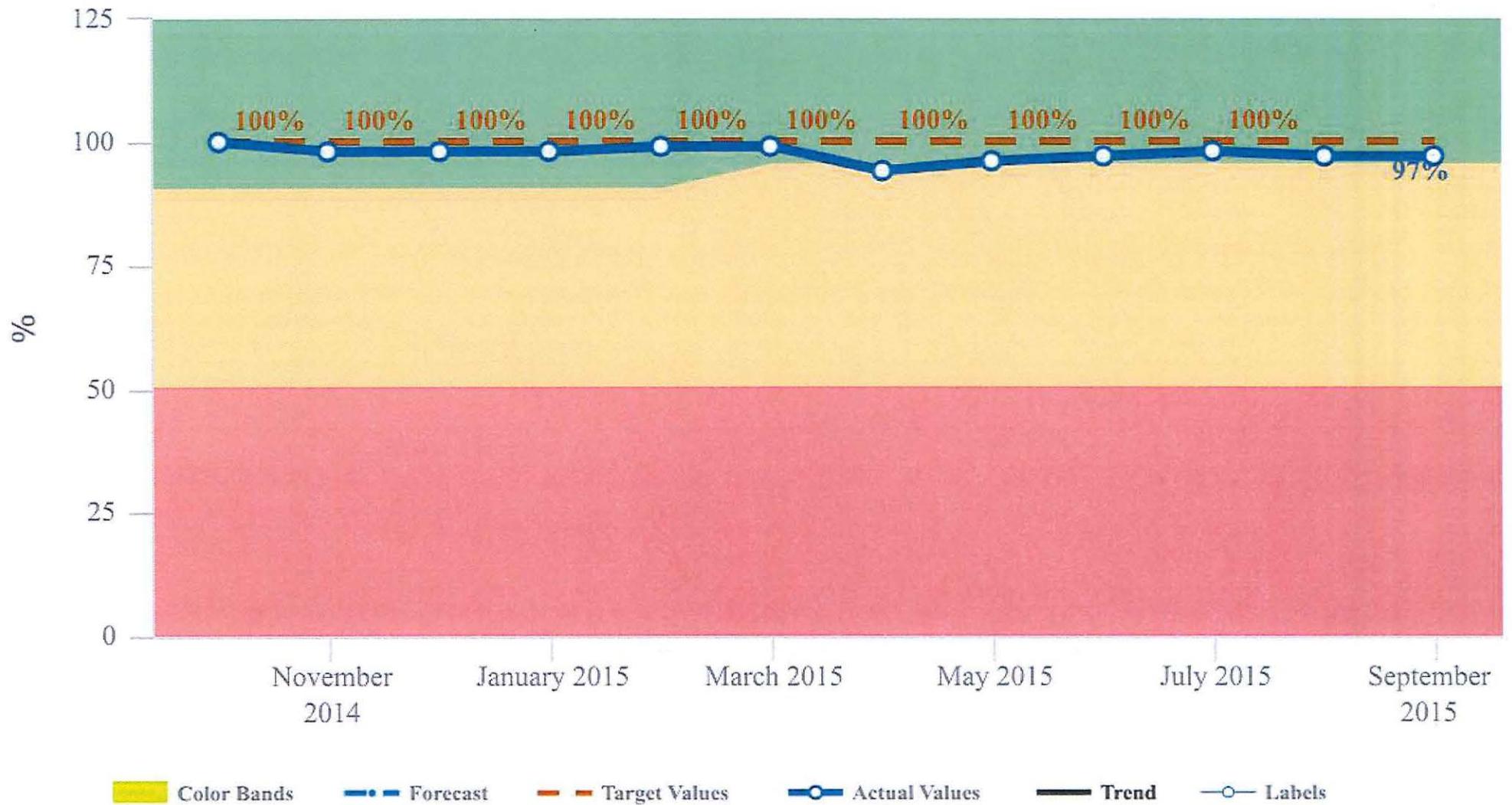
Percentage of young adults who are IV-E eligible



Percentage of young adults who have a Transition Living Plan.



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



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.³⁴ 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 (NCCF) 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 enter 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
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Ralene Cheng, Office of Probation
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Doug Lenz, Central Plains Center for Services
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Mary Jo Pankoke, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
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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.

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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	
<i>Adult Focus Group Entities</i>	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)
<i>Youth Focus Group Entities</i>	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	
<i>Ice-Breaker Question</i>	What Probation services or support do you think is most important?
<i>Adult Questions</i>	<p>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?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you see as pros and cons of this policy? <p>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?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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? <p>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?</p> <p>If yes, what types of services do you see as most important to offer?</p> <p>Who should be the main referral source and provide the case management for extended services?</p>
<i>Youth Questions</i>	<p>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?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why or why not? <p>Are there services that probation is providing that you would want to continue?</p> <p>If special services were provided to youth who had been involved with juvenile justice after they 19, what types of services are most important?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would you opt to keep your probation case open if that was the only way to continue

	<p>receiving those services?</p> <p>If services after 19 were available, would you want your current probation officer as your main contact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why or why not? <p>Is there anything else you want to share?</p>
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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.

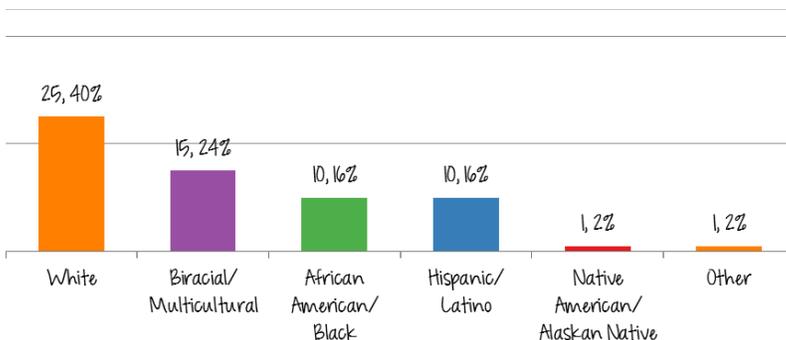
Results: Demographics

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.

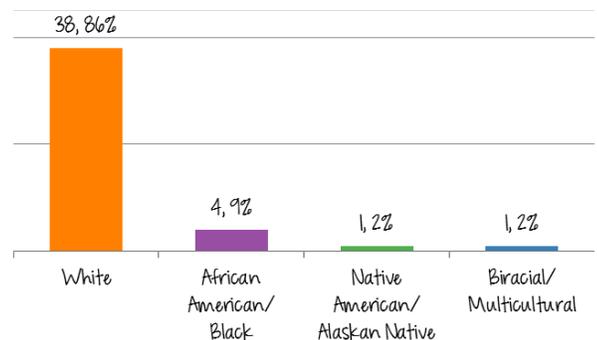
BASIC YOUTH INFORMATION

Young People's Towns		Adult's City/County/District	
Omaha	22	Lancaster County	14
Lincoln	10	Douglas County	7
North Platte	7	Gage County	2
Grand Island	4	Lincoln	2
Ames	2	Statewide	2
Broken Bow	2	17 Western & Central Co.	1
Hastings	2	Buffalo County	1
Kearney	2	Cass County	1
Lexington	2	District 1	1
		Douglas/Sarpy Co.	1
Chicago	1	Geneva/Fillmore	1
Columbus	1	Region 3 area	1
Elm Creek	1	Kearney/ Buffalo /Dist. 9	1
Fremont	1	North Platte	1
McCook	1	Lancaster Co. & 13 rural Co	1
Michoacan, Mexico	1	Omaha	1
Oxford	1	Grand Island/Hall & Howard Co.	1
Palisade	1	Sarpy County	1
		Sarpy/Otoe/Cass Co.	1
		Winnebago/ Thurston Co.	1

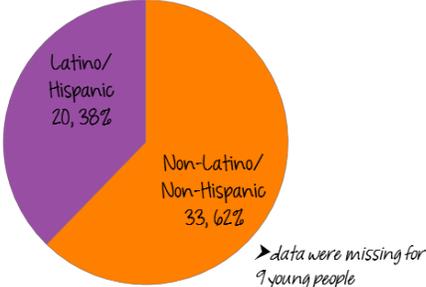
Racial Background of Youth



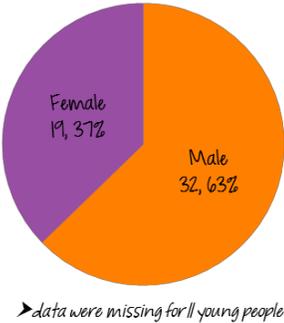
Racial Background of Adults



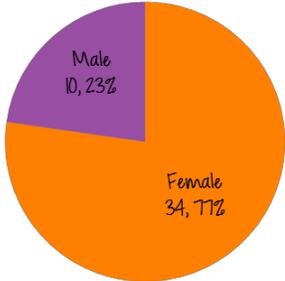
Ethnicity of Youth



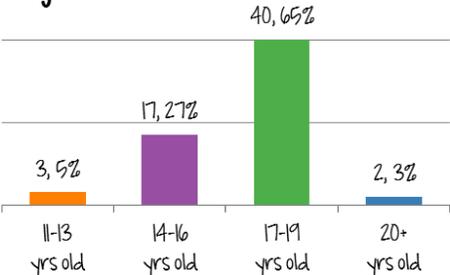
Gender of Youth



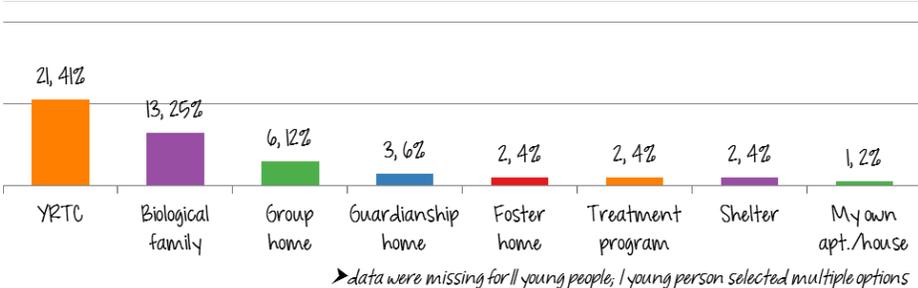
Gender of Adults



Ages of Youth



Current Living Situation of Youth



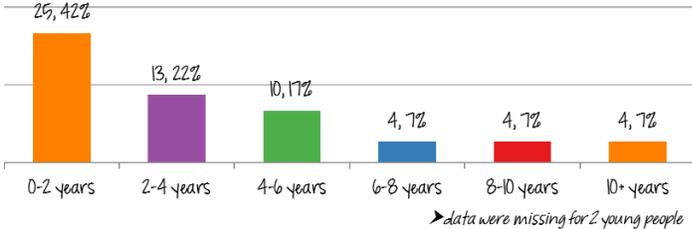
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH JUVENILE JUSTICE

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%).

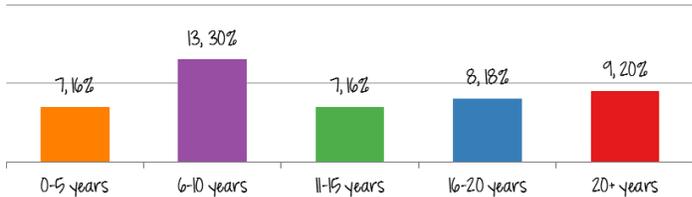
When looking at how long adult participants had been working either in juvenile justice or with at-risk youth, the length of time was much longer, with over 50% having spent 11 or more years with this population.

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.

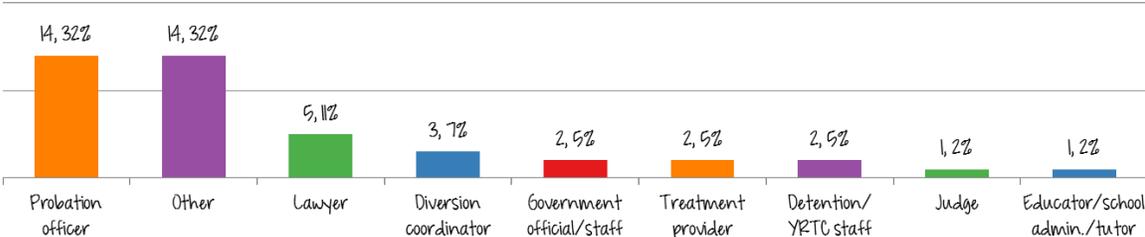
Length of Time Youth were in Juvenile Justice System



Length of Time Adults have Worked with at-Risk Youth



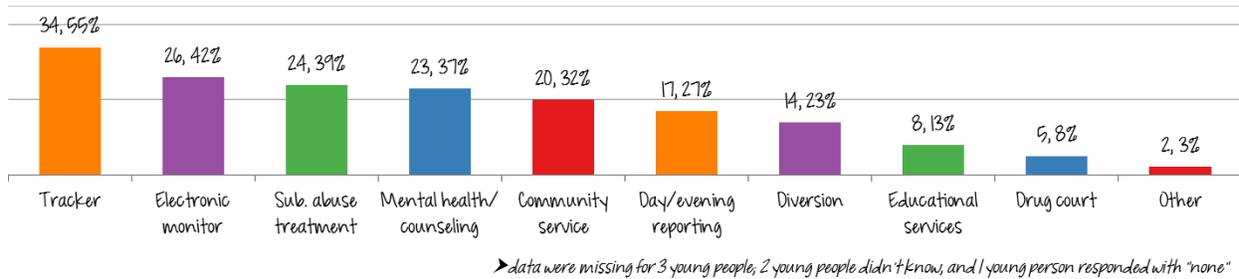
Adults' Primary Role with Youth on Probation



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%).

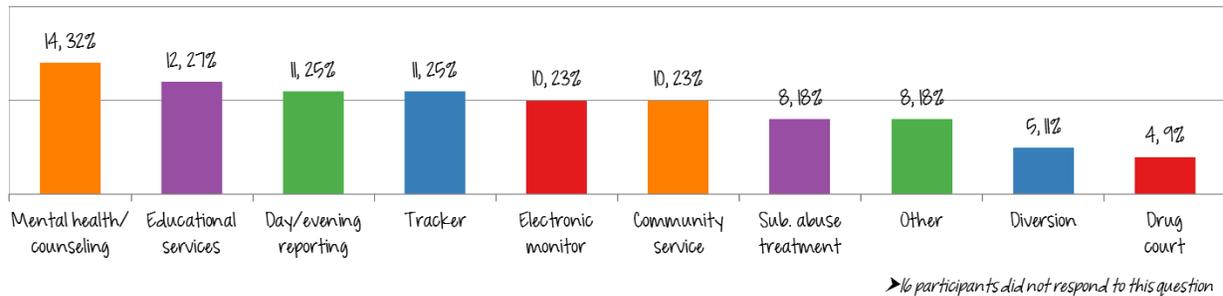
Involvement with Probation Services: Youth

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



Type of Probation Services Provided by Adults

Note: participants were asked to select all services that applied

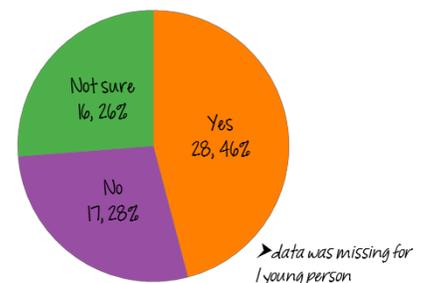


EXTENDING VOLUNTARY SERVICES PAST AGE 19

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%).

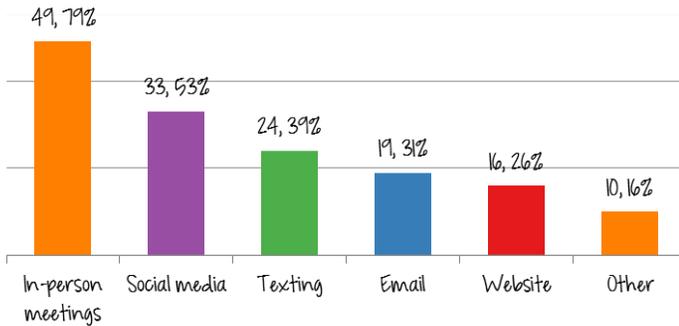
When asked about the best methods of keeping young people up-to-date on these potential extended services, youth vastly preferred in-person meetings (79%). Social media was the second most common response (53%), with the most common preferred type of social media being Facebook (69%).

Youth Perspective on Extended Services



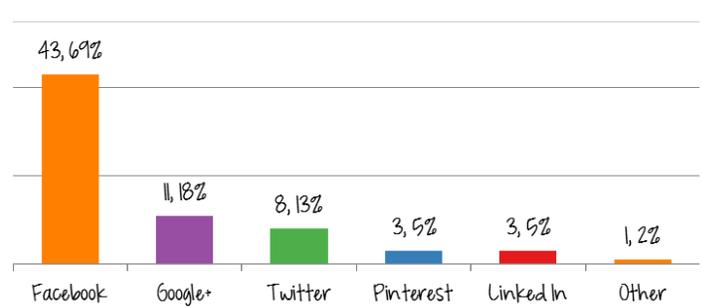
Best Way to Keep Youth Informed

Note: young people were asked to select all that apply



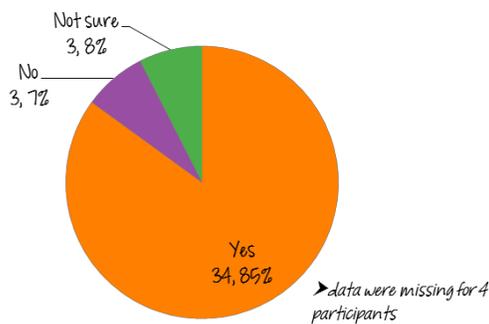
Type of Social Media

Note: young people were asked to select all that apply

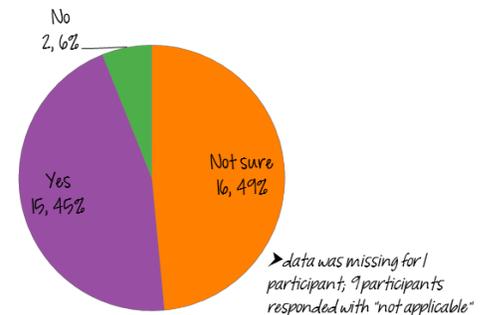


Alternatively, the adult group was much more in favor of offering voluntary services for probation-involved youth after the age of 19 (85%). Only a handful either disagreed (7%) or weren't sure (8%). When asked whether they – or their organization – would be able to extend their own work to include this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

Adult Perspective on Extended Services



Would Adult/ Adult's Organization be able to Extend Services?



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 willingness 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 over 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		
<i>Type of Service</i>	<i>Offered while Probation-Involved</i>	<i>Available via Extension Program</i>
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	
<i>Alternative Support People</i>	<i>Support Person Traits</i>
Mentor of the Youth's Choosing Drug & Alcohol Counselor Youth Counselor (like those at YRTC) Alumni of Juvenile Justice System Volunteer Older with More Life Experience Without a Probation Title Not	Understand the program and services available Nice/Kind/Supportive Respectful Understanding Honest Listens to What Youth Wants 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.

Suggested Services

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		
<i>Service Type</i>	<i>Specific Services</i>	<i>Need/Discussion</i>
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 <i>only</i> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 be 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 services are able to share their thoughts. **So, 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 services 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?

<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Trans or Transgender	
<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____	

2. Check your current living situation.

<input type="checkbox"/> Biological Family	<input type="checkbox"/> In My Own Apartment/House	<input type="checkbox"/> YRTC
<input type="checkbox"/> Adoptive Home	<input type="checkbox"/> Homeless/Couch-surfing	<input type="checkbox"/> Treatment Program
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster Home	<input type="checkbox"/> Group Home	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Guardianship Home		

3. Please check which Probation services you are (or were) involved in?

<input type="checkbox"/> Diversion	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health/Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/> Drug Court
<input type="checkbox"/> Day/Evening Reporting	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Service	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Tracker	<input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse Treatment	
<input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Monitor	<input type="checkbox"/> Educational Services	

4. How long have you been involved, or were you involved in the Juvenile Justice System?

<input type="checkbox"/> 0-2 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 8-10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 2-4 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 years or longer

5. Should Probation offer voluntary services for youth after the age of 19?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> 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)

<input type="checkbox"/> Email	<input type="checkbox"/> Web Site	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Social Media	<input type="checkbox"/> In-person Meetings	
<input type="checkbox"/> Texting		

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)

<input type="checkbox"/> Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/> Google+	<input type="checkbox"/> Other? (Please Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/> Linked In	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pinterest		

8. In terms of racial background, how do you identify yourself?

<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
<input type="checkbox"/> African American/Black	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American/Alaskan Native
<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	

9. In terms of your ethnicity, how do you identify yourself?

<input type="checkbox"/> Latino/Hispanic	<input type="checkbox"/> 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](tel:402.597.3100)/jsummers@voicesforchildren.com), or Jeanne Brandner ([402.471.4976](tel: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?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Judge | <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter or group home staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Educator, school administrator, or tutor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lawyer (please specify role):
_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Treatment provider | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Probation officer | <input type="checkbox"/> Detention or YRTC staff | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government official or staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Diversion coordinator | |

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:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversion | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health/Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> Drug Court |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day/Evening Reporting | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify)
_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tracker | <input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse Treatment | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Monitor | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Services | |

13. How long have you worked in juvenile justice or with at-risk youth?

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 years or longer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 years | |

14. Should Probation or another entity offer voluntary services for probation-involved youth after the age of 19?

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> 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?

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable |

16. In terms of racial background, how do you identify yourself?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American/Black | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American/Alaskan Native |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | |

17. In terms of your ethnicity, how do you identify yourself?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Latino/Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Latino/Non-Hispanic |
|--|--|

18. What is your gender?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Trans or Transgender |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female | <input type="checkbox"/> 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

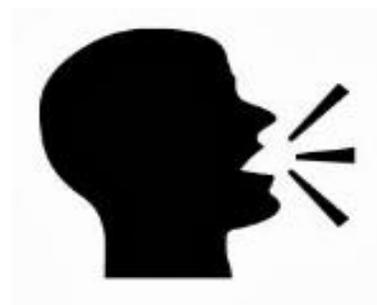
COMPILED: SEPTEMBER 2015

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

<i>Case Management Suggestions</i>	
<i>Alternative Support People</i>	<i>Support Person Traits</i>
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 <i>only</i> 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

<i>Programs</i>	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 maintenance 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 Independence⁷

<i>Programs</i>	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 maintenance 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 data 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 be 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.

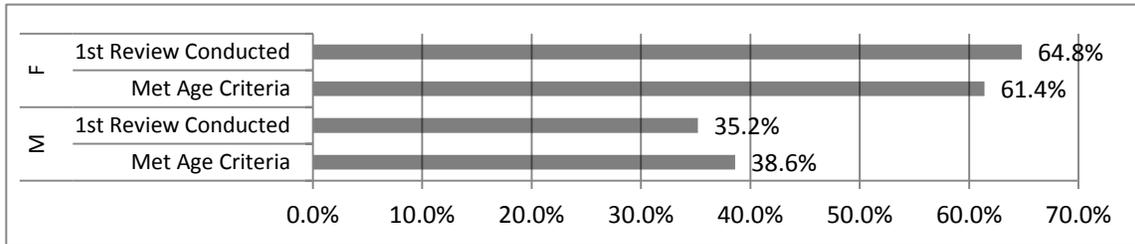
Based on our initial case reviews, case plans were written with the young adult's involvement 100% of the time, and NYTD was completed for 90 of the 91 young adults reviewed. Independence Coordinators were found to be meeting with the young adults on a monthly basis as required, 100% of the time.

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 how the young adult is progressing in each goal category.

Met Age Criteria to 1st Review Conducted Demographic Comparison

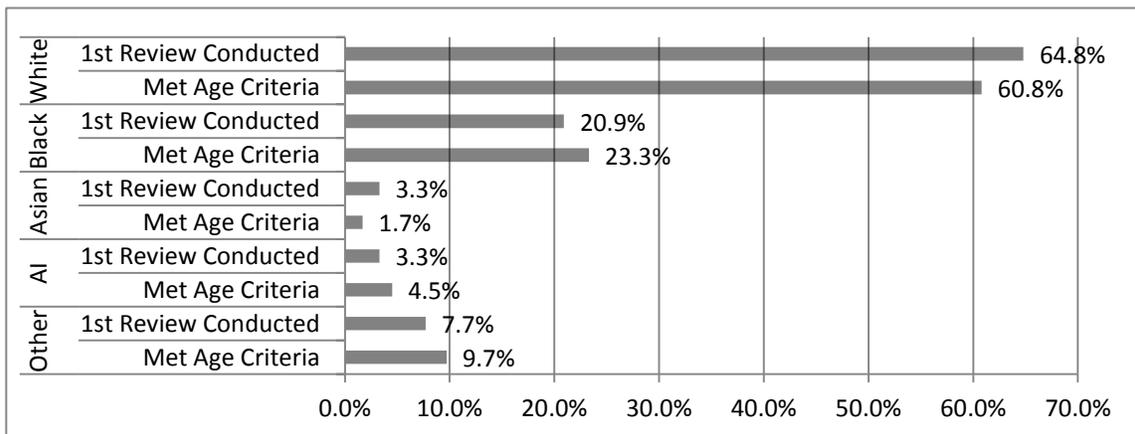
Gender

Met Age Criteria (19 & 20)			1st Review Conducted		
Male	68	38.6%	Male	32	35.2%
Female	108	61.4%	Female	59	64.8%
Total	176	100%	Total	91	100%



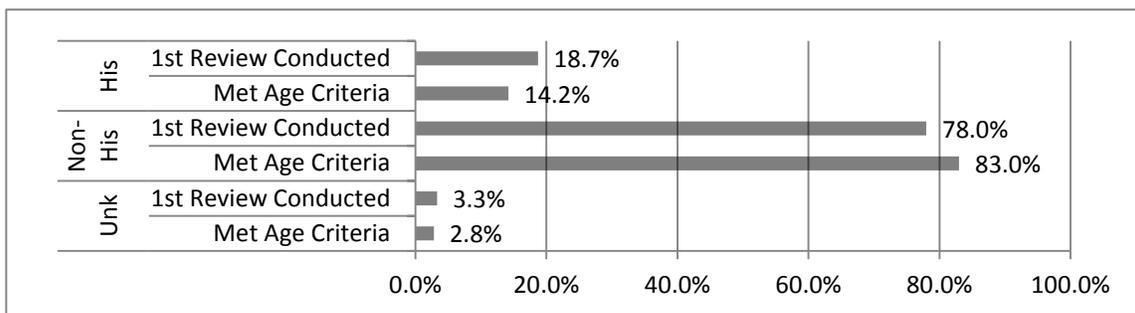
Race

Met Age Criteria (19 & 20)			1st Review Conducted		
White	107	60.8%	White	59	64.8%
Black	41	23.3%	Black	19	20.9%
Asian	3	1.7%	Asian	3	3.3%
American Indian	8	4.5%	American Indian	3	3.3%
Other or Unknown	17	9.7%	Other or Unknown	7	7.7%
Total	176	100%	Total	91	100%



Ethnicity

Met Age Criteria (19 & 20)			1st Review Conducted		
Hispanic	25	14.2%	Hispanic	17	18.7%
Non-Hispanic	146	83.0%	Non-Hispanic	71	78.0%
Unknown	5	2.8%	Unknown	3	3.3%
Total	176	100%	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.

Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee

Report to the Nebraska Children's Commission

November 17, 2015

Required Legislative Report

Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4217(4), the FCRRC must provide a report to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature on July 1, 2016. The report is anticipated to be completed by March 2016 so that the Commission may make any necessary alterations to the report.

Base Rate Workgroup

The Foster Care Rates Sub-Committee met to discuss the efficacy of the current rates implemented in July of 2014. Group members include representation from the three agencies that utilize the rates, DHHS – Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and Probation, as well as the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Family Association (NFAPA). The agencies utilizing the rates note that there have been no indications from the foster parents they serve that the rates are unreasonable or unfair. A foster parent survey is under development to provide data on the foster parent's experiences with the current rates. The Foster Care Rates Subcommittee will further develop recommendations following the completion of the foster parent survey.

Level of Care Workgroup

The Level of Care Workgroup continues meeting to develop recommendations surrounding the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility (NCR) tool. Recently, the Workgroup has worked to form recommendations to increase clarity surrounding transportation responsibility, youth transitions to permanency and/or independent living, the disparity between children's level of need and placement, and the possibility of creating an additional level of care. The workgroup is now working to include language from the Strengthening Families Act into the tool and more specifically address caregiver responsibilities that fall off of the NCR tool such as extracurricular activities.

Group Home Rate Sub-Committee

The Group Home Rate Sub-Committee was convened at the request of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to develop a methodology for DHHS to unbundle group home rates for the purposes of Title IV-E reporting. The sub-committee completed this task and the Commission directed the sub-committee to further advance the work on group home rates by using the agreed upon methodology to establish recommendations for group home rates. The sub-committee continued to meet to work on this task and developed the attached report as an educational document intended to highlight the difference between the rates paid and the

provider's actual expense to begin the process of bringing payment in line with cost. The FCRRRC commends the work of the sub-committee, and recommends the following:

Recommendation:

1. That the Commission accepts the attached report of the Group Home Rate Sub-Committee.
2. There is a need for the issue of group home care to be looked at further through a legislative review, in order to measure the quality of care, cost of care, and performance outcomes. Additionally, it is important to identify the acuity of children and youth served when considering outcome based performance measures.

The next meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, December 9, 2015.

Group Home Rate Sub-Committee

Report to the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee

Sep 25, 2015

The Group Home Rate Sub-Committee was created by the Nebraska Children's Commission ("Commission") and Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee ("FCRRC") for the purposes of developing a methodology for unbundling group home rates at the request of the Department of Health and Human Services. The Sub-Committee completed this task and presented its report to the FCRRC on July 7th and to the Commission on July 21st. The Commission requested the Sub-Committee to continue their work and calculate the actual costs of providing group home services using the methodology established to unbundle the rates. The Sub-Committee presents this report as an educational document intended to highlight the difference between the rates paid and the provider's actual expense to begin the process of bringing payment in line with cost.

Group Home Definitions

Emergency Shelter: Services are provided by trained staff that are awake and providing supervision to youth 24 hours a day and 7 days a week

Group Home A: Services are provided by trained staff that are awake and providing supervision to youth 24 hours a day.

Group Home B: Services are provided by trained staff that provide supervision during awake hours.

Process

The group's first step was to review the variables used in the recent work of establishing methodology for unbundling current group home rates for Title IV-E reporting purposes. The group home providers were in agreement that the most significant gap was in staffing ratios. During the group's initial work to review Title IV-E adjustments, the staffing ratios that were utilized reflected *minimum licensing standards* as follows:

Average ratio in 24 hour period				
<u>Staff</u>	<u>Clients</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Note</u>	<u>Calculation</u>
1	6	18	Awake hours	108
1	12	<u>6</u>	Sleep hours	<u>72</u>
		24		180
				180 / 24 = 7.5

Since minimum licensing standards are the same for Emergency Shelter, Group Home A, and Group Home B, the same ratio of 1 staff to every 7.5 clients was used in previous work for all services.

The current DHHS-CFS Contracts require Service Providers to meet the minimum Direct Care Staff to Youth ratios required by licensing standards. All providers involved in the sub-committee feel that the current ratios of one staff to six clients during awake hours, and one staff to twelve clients during sleep hours are too low, and have chosen to employ direct care staff at significantly higher levels than called for by licensing standards.

The group homes represented at the Sub-Committee ranged from large organizations with approximately 400 beds to community based homes with six beds. Ultimately the group chose to use a weighted average to reach the staffing ratios found in the report. The group discussed their staffing ratios, and arrived at the weighted average as follows:

Emergency Shelter	1 staff to every 4.25 clients
Group Home A	1 staff to every 4.7 clients
Group Home B	1 staff to every 5.06 clients

Clarification on Hourly Pay Rate

The Sub-Committee arrived at the average hourly rate of pay for a direct care worker after gathering input from providers based on their actual experience. While it might appear at first glance that the staff at Group Home B would have a reduced hourly wage due to sleep hours, the Sub-Committee found that the difference between the services is found not necessarily in the hourly rate of pay for a direct care worker, but in the staffing ratio.

Provider Survey Tool

The group recognized that the survey tool used to collect non salary costs contains a minor flaw in collecting data from different agencies that utilize different models of providing services. Due to the relatively small (+ or - \$5 a day) range of error, the group chose not to delve deeper to rectify this minimal error.

Results of Cost Calculation

The Sub-Committee's calculation of actual costs is attached to this report. The current group home payment rate and calculated actual costs are below:

	Current DHHS Payment Rate Per Day	Current Probation Payment Rate Per Day	Current NFC Payment Rate Per Day	Calculated Actual Costs Per Day
Emergency Shelter	\$ 146.00	\$ 150.00 ¹	\$ 153.00	\$ 276.48
Group Home A	\$ 116.00	\$ 135.00	\$ 115.00	\$ 268.75
Group Home B	\$ 89.50	\$ 100.00	\$ 92.50	\$ 254.41

The Group Home Sub-Committee presents this information as a first step in the process of bringing awareness to the significant gap between current payment rates and current costs of providing care.

Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee Recommendations

The Group Home Rate Committee Co-chairs presented these findings to the FCRRRC on September 25, 2015. The FCRRRC commended the work of the group and moved to advance the findings to the Commission, with the recommendation that the provision of group home services should be reviewed through a legislative study in order to measure quality of care, cost of care, and performance outcomes. Additionally, the FCRRRC noted the importance of identifying the acuity of the children and youth served when considering outcome based performance measures.

¹ Probation additionally utilizes "Enhanced Shelter Care," a residential service that provides 24 hour awake staff and increased structure, supervision and security. Probation pays providers \$180.00 per day to provide this service. The group did not calculate the costs of providing this service as it was outside the scope of the original charge to the group.

Group Home Rate Sub-Committee Members

Name	Organization
Doug Kreifels, Co-Chair	DHHS
Cindy Rudolph, Co-Chair	CEDARS
Sue Baumert	Child Saving Institute
Mike Cantrell	Rite of Passage
Robin Chadwell	Nebraska Families Collaborative
John Danforth	Probation
Jeff DeWispelare	Omaha Home for Boys
Corrie Edwards	Mid-Plains Center for Behavioral Healthcare Services
Mariana Johnson	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Kendra Leonhardt-Driggs	Nebraska Youth Center
Ross Manhart	DHHS
Randy Ptacek	Boystown
Kari Rumbaugh	Probation
Nanette Simmons	DHHS
Garrett Swanberg	Release Ministries
Michaela Young	CEDARS

GROUP HOME RATE SUBCOMMITTEE
8/12/2015

a	b (a * %)	c	d	e 8760/2080=4.21fte's	f (d * e)	g (f * %)	h ((f + g) * %)	i (f + g + h)	j (i / b / 365)
Direct Care Specialist									
				365*24 = 8760		11.5%	Ann + Adj * .34	Total	
Wghttd Avg Provider Act	85%			4.212 fte		(6 wks =2 hol+4 vac ill &train)	0.34	Wages	Per Placement
<u>Avg ratio per 24 hr</u>	<u>Adj for occupancy %</u>		<u>Hourly \$</u>	<u>Hrs per year</u>	<u>Annual \$</u>	<u>Adj for pd leave</u>	<u>Benefits</u>	<u>Taxes Bens</u>	<u>Per Day Calc</u>
4.250	3.61	Shelter	13.50	8,760	118,260	13,645	44,848	176,753	134.05
4.700	4.00	Group Home A	13.50	8,760	118,260	13,645	44,848	176,753	121.22
5.059	4.30	Group Home B	13.50	8,760	118,260	13,645	44,848	176,753	112.62

Direct Care Supervisor

7*7.5*.85/(4.21*1.115)

Ratio to children	Ratio to dir care wrkrs		Hourly \$	hrs per year	Annual \$	Benefits	Taxes Bens	Total Wages	(i / a / 365) Per Placement Per Day Calc
5.39	7.00	Shelter	23.30	2,080	48,464	16,478	64,942	33.04	
5.96	7.00	Group Home A	23.30	2,080	48,464	16,478	64,942	29.88	
6.41	7.00	Group Home B	23.30	2,080	48,464	16,478	64,942	27.76	

	Direct Care IV E Maintenance Staffing	Supervisor IV E Mnt Staffing	provider survey non-sal IV E Maint	provider survey non-sal IV E Facility Operations	IV E Sub Total	0.2 Indirect	TOTAL
Shelter	134.05	33.04	53.28	10.03	230.40	46.08	\$ 276.48
Group Home A	121.22	29.88	68.24	4.63	223.96	44.79	\$ 268.75
Group Home B	112.62	27.76	63.72	7.91	212.01	42.40	\$ 254.41

¹ sup ratio * dir care ratio * occ % / (dir care fte's * (1+pd leave %))

Juvenile Services Committee

Report to the Nebraska Children’s Commission and Judiciary Committee

November 17, 2015

The Juvenile Services Committee (“Committee”) was created by LB821 (2012) and modified by LB561(2013) to create recommendations related to the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (“YRTCs”) and the juvenile justice system of care to the Nebraska Children’s Commission (“Commission”) and Judiciary Committee of the Legislature. After releasing its Phase I Strategic Recommendations, the Committee has continued to meet to further the recommendations in the Phase I report and provide a forum for collaboration amongst juvenile justice stakeholders.

The past two years have seen large changes due to the juvenile justice reform initiatives in LB561 (2013) and LB464 (2014). These changes reflect a desire from stakeholders at all levels to effectively serve youth in the juvenile justice system, and a change in philosophy from punitive and corrections based to rehabilitative and trauma informed. Nebraska’s juvenile system remains in a state of flux as the effects of the reform become observable. As further changes to the juvenile justice system are contemplated, the Committee emphasizes that a successful juvenile justice system is a comprehensive, accountable, culturally competent continuum of care that meets the needs of youth and families. The information and recommendations below reflect the Committee’s work and dedication to attaining such a system for the youth and families of Nebraska. This report contains first, the Committee’s recommendations and work plan, and second, past accomplishments from the Phase I Strategic Recommendations.

Mission

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

Vision

Continuous Leadership and Oversight
 Transparent System Collaboration with Shared Partnerships and Ownership
 Right Youth, Right Services, Right Time
 Family Centered and Youth Focused
 Consistent, Stable, Skilled, Effective Workforce
 Address Social Racial and Ethnic Disparities
 Data Driven Decision-making
 Consistent and Sustainable Funding

Goal

The Juvenile Services Committee’s goal is to work collaboratively with the executive, legislative, judicial, and county branches of government; the Nebraska Children’s Commission (“Commission”);

and other key stakeholders to establish and support the development of the Ideal Juvenile Justice Treatment System that will prevent children and youth from entering or becoming more deeply involved in the juvenile justice system.

Legislative Recommendations (2016 Legislative Session)

Foundational Principles

1. Establish and support a model for juvenile justice collaboration and implementation of necessary juvenile justice services across the state. This model of collaboration should include executive, legislative, judicial, and county branches of government.
2. Create Legislation that children in the juvenile justice system should be a priority.

Legal System Changes

3. Require all youth involved in the juvenile justice system have quality legal counsel. This requirement should be codified in statute to ensure that youth have access to counsel who are competent in the practice of juvenile law. Necessary funding should be appropriated to comply with this requirement.
4. Encourage the Supreme Court of Nebraska to require dedicated Continuing Legal Education (CLE) hours for all legal parties who practice in juvenile court, and dedicated Judicial Branch Education (JBE) hours for judges who hear juvenile law matters.
5. Create and/or clarify existing statutory language to ensure that the Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over youth and families, regardless of the filing type. The Court must have the authority to order services for the entire family in order to treat the underlying family issues often experienced by youth in the juvenile justice system.

Core Design and Framework

6. Utilize the Child and Adolescent System Program (“CASSP”) Principles as a core design framework for creating effective Community based services for youth at each level of involvement in the juvenile justice system. CASSP Principles are attached at Appendix B.
7. Develop a continuum of services that addresses the strengths and needs of the youth through risk assessment, needs assessments and effective case management.

Nebraska Children’s Commission Related Recommendations

8. The Juvenile Services Committee is currently under the umbrella of the Nebraska Children’s Commission (“Commission”), set to sunset in 2016. If extended, the Juvenile Services Committee should be established as a standing advisory committee to oversee juvenile justice reform and serve as a body to encourage collaboration amongst stakeholders. If not extended, the Committee should stand with a different administrative structure as an advisory committee.
9. Establish and require uniform statewide screening and assessment tools, including educational assessments, which shall be conducted when youth first encounter the juvenile justice system,

at various times when moving between levels of care, and when there is a change in clinical status or presentation. Screening and selective assessment should be conducted when youth entered residential programs, including the county juvenile detention center and YRTC. All juvenile justice entities (Law enforcement, all legal representatives, and judicial entities) and system stakeholders must utilize and follow assessment recommendations. All assessment and recommendation information obtained must be shared with all stakeholders who have a need to know and right to know to optimize care for each youth.

10. Continue incentivizing and encouraging counties, groups of counties, and tribes to access funding under the Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program to divert youth from the juvenile justice system, reduce the number of youth in detention and secure confinement, and assist in transitioning youth from out of home placement. Additionally, incentivize demonstrating a successful use of braided or blended funding in programs in evidence based programs supporting the above goals.
11. Recommend that the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) and the Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform Crossover Youth Practice model to be implemented statewide.
12. The Juvenile Services Committee will provide input and collaborate with the B2i Advisory Committee on its recommendations regarding extending voluntary supports for youth gaining out of the child welfare system to the juvenile justice population.
13. Fund a research project through one of Nebraska's Universities to examine data related to status offenders and determine the best policies to serve this population. Status offenders are youth who are charged with or adjudicated for conduct that would not constitute a crime if committed by an adult [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-245(25)]. This population requires different services and supports than other types of juvenile offenders, and is at risk for being pushed further into the juvenile and adult justice systems.

YRTC Related Recommendations

The juvenile justice system is undeniably different than it was when first examined by this Committee over two years ago to create the Phase I Strategic Plan. The Plan includes the recommendation that all necessary action be completed to transition the YRTCs into regionally based facilities, based on Missouri's regional model. Since this time, representatives of the Office of Juvenile Services have continued to collaborate with the Committee and provide information about the changes in the YRTC population and treatments. It is clear that the effects of legislative change are still playing out in the demographics and needs of youth in the YRTCs, and the Committee believes it would be premature to make specific recommendations on the structure of a regional system without further analysis. The Committee has consulted with and received presentation and information from Missouri's Division of Youth Services director and staff. Missouri's juvenile justice reform effort took place over a span of fifteen years of careful planning, stakeholder buy-in, culture change, and continuous data review and analysis. Nebraska is still experiencing the effects of sea change in its juvenile justice system, and anticipates the potential for further change in the 2016 legislative session. The Committee's plans and priorities for this process are below:

14. The Committee has reaffirmed its goal of transitioning Nebraska’s justice system to a regional model where youth are served in the least restrictive environment as close to their communities as possible.
15. The Committee has created a Data Analysis and Mapping Taskforce (“Taskforce”) to create recommendations related to the process of moving to a regional system. The Taskforce has representation from the Office of Juvenile Services, Probation, the Foster Care Review Office, and the Juvenile Justice Institute at the University of Nebraska – Omaha. The first meeting of the Taskforce will take place on December 8, 2015, and will report to the full Committee at its January meeting.
16. The Committee will use the information identified by the Data Analysis and Mapping Taskforce to create recommendations regarding a pilot site for a regional facility, to determine the type of youth to be served, the kinds of programs to be offered, and the intake requirements. Potential populations to be served at this pilot site include the population of juvenile justice system involved youth who are receiving treatment out of state, youth who are committed to a YRTC at the age of 18, or another population identified by the Taskforce.

Additional Committee Priorities

17. The Committee plans to continue its research and analysis regarding screening and assessments, and anticipates releasing recommendations regarding establishing uniform statewide screening and assessment tools in 2016.
18. The Committee will continue to work with the B2i Advisory Committee to provide input on the extension of voluntary services to youth aging out of the juvenile justice system.
19. As additional legislative bills are introduced to continue or restructure the juvenile justice reform efforts, the Committee will provide feedback and recommendations to the Nebraska Children’s Commission and Judiciary Committee of the Legislature.

Previous Recommendations and Accomplishments

The Juvenile Services Committee submitted the Phase I Strategic Recommendations in December of 2013 to the Commission and the Judiciary Committee of the Legislature. The recommendations contained within were considered foundational to creating the ideal juvenile justice system, and built upon to legislatures work in LB561 (2013). The listing below details legislation and changes that align with the Committee’s recommendations:

Committee Recommendation: Place youth in a YRTC only when community safety concerns exist after non-response to less restrictive settings. Develop guidelines to restrict YRTC placement to only those youth adjudicated of the most serious offenses or who present a danger to the community.

Accomplishment: LB464 (2014) changed the YRTC entrance criteria so that youth may be placed in a YRTC only after all levels of probation supervision have been exhausted, and placement at a YRTC is a matter of immediate and urgent necessity for the protection of the juvenile or the person or property of another or it appears that the juvenile is likely to flee the jurisdiction of the court [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-586].

Committee Recommendation: Require YRTCs to provide evidence based, trauma informed treatment for behavioral health disorder, mental health disorders, and substance abuse orders and substance abuse disorders to include appropriate medication assisted treatment.

Accomplishment: LB464 (2014) requires the Office of Juvenile Services to begin implementing evidence based practices, policies, and procedures by January 15, 2016. The Office of Juvenile Services has done significant work on this requirement already, and anticipates meeting this requirement in January 2016.

Committee Recommendation: Change statutory language so that all juvenile law violations (excluding minor traffic offenses) originate in juvenile court, for all youth under age 18.

Accomplishment: LB464 (2014) made changes to the juvenile court's original jurisdiction so that All misdemeanors involving youth under the age of 16 are filed and heard in juvenile court. All cases involving misdemeanors for youth aged sixteen years old are filed in the juvenile court, and beginning on January 1, 2017, all cases involving misdemeanors for youth who are seventeen years of age will also be filed in juvenile court. Felonies involving youth under the age of 14, must be filed and heard in juvenile court. Class IIA and IV felonies involving youth under the age of 18 must originate in juvenile court. [Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-246.01]

Committee Recommendation: The Phase I Strategic Plan makes numerous recommendations meant to support counties, groups of counties, and tribes to identify services gaps in the juvenile justice services array and access funding through the Community-based Juvenile Services Program to support the creation of needed juvenile justice services to improve outcomes for youth who are in the juvenile justice system or at-risk for system involvement.

Accomplishment: LB464 reaffirmed the goals of the Community based Juvenile Services Program, which include prioritizing programs and services that divert youth from the juvenile justice system, reduce the number of youth in detention and secure confinement, and assist in transitioning youth from out of home placement. Programs funded under through the Community based Juvenile Services Aid Program must be based on or grounded in evidence-based practices, programs, and research. [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4404.02, LB464 (2014)]

Committee Recommendation: Work with the Bridge to Independence ("B2i") Advisory Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission to extend voluntary services for children who are aging out of systems to include children who are in out of home placement and have been in the juvenile justice system.

Accomplishment: The B2i Advisory Committee established a Juvenile Justice Taskforce to make recommendations regarding the extension of voluntary services to the juvenile justice population. This Taskforce convened multiple focus groups consisting of stakeholders and young adults, including a focus group made up of the Juvenile Services Committee. The

Juvenile Justice Taskforce has forwarded its recommendations to the Commission for approval at the November 2015 Commission meeting.

Juvenile Services Committee Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Location	Organization
Jeanne Brandner	Voting	Lincoln	Administrative Office of Probation
Nicole Brundo (Co-Chair)	Voting	Omaha	Douglas County Attorney's Office, Juvenile Division
Kim Culp	Voting	Omaha	Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center
Barb Fitzgerald	Voting	Lincoln	LPS - Yankee Hill Program
Judge Larry Gendler	Voting	Pappillion	Sarpy County Juvenile Court
Tony Green	Voting	Lincoln	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services, Office of Juvenile Services
Kim Hawekotte (Co-Chair)	Voting	Lincoln	Foster Care Review Office
Dr. Anne Hobbs	Voting	Lincoln	Juvenile Justice Institute
Ron Johns	Voting	Gering	Scotts Bluff County Detention Center
Nick Juliano	Voting	Boys Town	Boys Town
Cynthia Kennedy	Voting	Lincoln	Nebraska Crime Commission
Tom McBride	Voting	Lincoln	Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association
Jana Peterson	Voting	Lincoln	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services, Office of Juvenile Services
Cassy Rockwell	Voting	Lincoln	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Juliet Summers	Voting	Omaha	Voices for Children in Nebraska
Dr. Richard Wiener	Voting	Lincoln	University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Dr. Ken Zoucha	Voting	Hastings	DHHS, Division Behavioral Health
Jim Bennett	Resource	Lincoln	Administrative Office of Probation
Sen. Kathy Campbell	Resource	Lincoln	Nebraska Legislative Council
Dannie Elwood	Resource	Lincoln	DHHS, Managed Care Unit, Delivery Systems, Medicaid and Long-Term Care
Catherine Gekas Steeby	Resource	Lincoln	DHHS, Division of Medicaid & Long-Term Care

Juvenile Services Committee Membership

Christine Henningsen	Resource	Lincoln	Center on Children, Family and the Law
Liz Hruska	Resource	Lincoln	Nebraska Legislative Fiscal Office
Mark Mason	Resource	Lincoln	Administrative Office of Probation
Katie McLeese Stephenson	Resource	Lincoln	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Monica Miles-Steffens	Resource	Lincoln	Administrative Office of Probation
Steve Milliken	Resource	Lincoln	Nebraska Department of Education
Jerall Moreland	Resource	Lincoln	Ombudsman's Office
Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks	Resource	Lincoln	Nebraska Legislative Council, District 28
Judge Linda Porter	Resource	Lincoln	Lancaster County Juvenile Court
Adam Proctor	Resource	Lincoln	Magellan Behavioral Health
Julie Rogers	Resource	Lincoln	Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare
Dan Scarborough	Resource	Geneva	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services

Appendix B

CASSP Principles

- 1. Youth-centered:** Services are planned to meet the individual needs of the youth, rather than to fit the youth into an existing service. Services consider the youth's family and community contexts, are developmentally appropriate and youth-specific, and also build on the strengths of the youth and family to meet the mental health, social, spiritual, and physical needs of the youth.
- 2. Family –focused:** Services recognize that the family is the primary support system for the youth. The family participates as a full partner in all stages of the decision-making and treatment planning process, including implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A family may include biological, adoptive and foster parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives, and other adults who are committed to the youth. The development of mental health policy at state and local levels includes family representation.
- 3. Community-based:** Whenever possible, services are delivered in the youth's home community, drawing on formal and informal resources to promote the youth's successful participation in the community. Community resources include not only mental health professionals and provider agencies, but also social, religious and cultural organizations and other natural community support networks.
- 4. Multi-system:** Services are planned in collaboration with all the youth-serving systems involved in the youth's life. Representatives from all these systems and the family collaborate to define the goals for the youth, develop a service plan, develop the necessary resources to implement the plan, provide appropriate support to the youth and family, and evaluate progress.
- 5. Culturally competent:** Culture determines our world view and provides a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality that are reflected in our behavior. Therefore, services that are culturally competent are provided by individuals who have the skills to recognize and respect the behavior, ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies and practices characteristic of a particular group of people.
- 6. Least restrictive/least intrusive:** Services take place in settings that are the most appropriate and natural for the youth and family and are the least restrictive and intrusive available to meet the needs of the youth and family, while maintaining public safety.

Adapted from Pennsylvania Child and Adolescent Service System Program

**Community Ownership of Child Well-Being Workgroup
Report to the Nebraska Children's Commission
May 19, 2015**

The Community Ownership of Child Well-Being Workgroup is bringing the following two recommendations to the Commission for consideration and, hopefully, approval.

- 1) One of the action items our workgroup has been addressing is the establishment of a state level collective impact group. We are recommending that the Commission recognize the Prevention Partnership as a state level collective impact group focused on improving the well being of children. Following are excerpts from the Prevention Partnership's Team Charter.

Vision: Children, youth and families in Nebraska are safe; healthy; supported in quality environments; ready for and succeed in school; and successfully transition into adulthood.

Mission: State leaders work across systems and support community collaboration to promote child well being, and provide safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for children and families in Nebraska.

Common Agenda: Improve the well being of children, youth and families in Nebraska.

Stakeholders defined well being as five selected outcomes for children and families with the following related indicators.

- **Children are safe.**
 - Rate of substantiated maltreatment reports and child abuse per 1,000 children
 - Rate of unintentional injury and death
 - Rate of children experiencing bullying
- **Children are healthy.**
 - Infant mortality rates (Infancy)
 - Low birth weights (Infancy)
 - Obesity (Children)
 - Rate of youth substance abuse/use (Youth)
 - Depression rates (Youth)
 - Access to health care (Life span)
 - Health insurance coverage rates (Life span)
- **Children are supported in quality environments.**
 - Poverty rate
 - Areas of concentrated disadvantage
 - Permanency and mobility of foster children
- **Children are ready for and succeed in school and beyond**
 - 4th, 8th, 11th grade proficiency
 - Quality early childhood education enrollment and access

- Mother's education level at birth
- Truancy/suspension/expulsion and absenteeism rates
- ***Youth successfully transitioning into adulthood.***
 - High school graduation rates
 - Juvenile violent crimes/arrest per 1,000 juveniles
 - Employed or enrolled in post-secondary education

Objectives and Actions:

- Use **shared measurement** and continuous review of progress.
 - Determine desired key outcomes for children, youth and families. (*Stakeholder meeting December 17, 2013*)
 - Determine key uniform indicators that align with the desired outcomes across system partners. (*Stakeholder meeting May 2, 2014*)
 - Promote and align measurable key outcomes over time, at the state, regional, and community level
 - Periodic and collective review of indicators and progress toward improving key outcomes at state, regional, and community level. Population indicators will be reviewed annually or more frequently when reasonable.
 - Progress shall be measured through identifying benchmarks and periodic review of selected activities at intervals deemed necessary by the team to move the work forward.
- Use strategy teams to focus on **activities** of state, regional, and local partners which are **mutually reinforcing** and align with indicators that demonstrate progress toward achieving positive outcomes.
 - Promote child well being and mitigate risk when possible for adverse childhood experiences (ACES/Bullying Team).
 - Support behavioral health with specific focus on population indicators involving substance use and depression. (Behavioral Health Team)
 - Promote permanency and reduce negative effects of frequent moves when children require out-of-home placement. (Permanency Team)
 - Strategy Teams will maintain working action plans. Goals, strategies, actions will be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (SMART). Strategy Teams may involve membership beyond those on the Collaborative.
- Include processes that support and enhance **continuous communication** among and between state, regional, and community level partners.
 - Quarterly meetings of the Collaborative shall provide an opportunity to check-in regarding progress made by Strategy Teams. Meeting agendas and summaries shall be shared with all members.

- Strategy Teams shall work between quarterly meetings, keep the work plan updated for their own team, and report out at quarterly meetings on activities, barriers encountered, and next steps.
- Members shall communicate the work of the Collaborative with their own organization, division, agency, or board.
- Members shall communicate efforts between the Collaborative with other related state, regional, and community teams such as the Children’s Commission.
- The Backbone organization shall be the repository for collection and organization of shared information, send out meeting notices, meeting summaries, maintain a membership list, and provide other support activities.
- Support collaboration between and among state, regional, and community level partnership. This requires organization, time, resources, and commitment through “backbone support” of the effort at state and local levels.
 - The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation shall provide the backbone support for the Collaborative.

Group Composition: The Prevention Partnership is comprised of representatives from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (Divisions of Children and Family Services, Behavioral Health, Public Health), Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Supreme Court Office of Probation Administration, Nebraska Crime Commission, Nebraska Child Abuse Prevention Fund Board, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, State Legislative representatives, and representation from private philanthropy.

The Community Ownership of Child Well-Being Workgroup believes the Prevention Partnership meets the intent of the Children’s Commission recommendation that a state level collective impact group be established. One of the principles the Children’s Commission established at an early meeting was that we would build on what already exists and not duplicate efforts. We recommend that the Children’s Commission recognize the Prevention Partnership as a state level collective impact group. We further recommend that the Children’s Commission ask the Prevention Partnership to address barriers that were identified by communities in moving collaborative initiatives forward, including the blending and braiding of funds.

- 2) Prevention is a focus of the Children’s Commission’s work. That term is frequently used during our meetings. The Community Ownership of Child Well-Being Workgroup believes it is important that the Commission and its workgroups and committees operate using common definitions. We offer the following definitions for a Prevention System and the three levels of Prevention for the Commission’s consideration and, hopefully, adoption.

Prevention System Definition: A Prevention System includes coordinated services and supports to prevent children from entering higher end systems such as the child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, homeless, and truancy systems and to promote protective factors and build connections and resources to build assets for sustainable family outcomes. We will work to understand and recognize families at risk for entering the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, failing in school, and coordinate a response to best serve children, youth and families, and have access to needed supports and services.

THE PREVENTION SYSTEM includes three levels of prevention strategies:

Primary Prevention – Low Risk Universal Strategies: *Primary* prevention activities are directed at the general population and attempt to stop maltreatment and other problems before it occurs. All members of the community have access to and may benefit from these services. Primary prevention activities with a universal focus seek to raise awareness of the general public, service providers, and decision-makers about the scope and problems associated with child maltreatment and other issues.

Secondary Prevention – “At High Risk” Targeted Strategies: *Secondary* prevention activities with a high-risk focus are offered to populations that have one or more risk factors associated with child maltreatment, such as poverty, parental substance abuse, young parental age, parental mental health concerns, and parental or child disabilities. Programs may target services for communities or neighborhoods that have a high incidence of any or all of these risk factors.

Tertiary Prevention – High Need Individual Strategies: *Tertiary* prevention activities focus on families where maltreatment and/or other problems have already occurred (above) systems to be involved and seek to reduce the negative consequences and to prevent its recurrence.

Other Workgroup Activities

We would like to take this opportunity to update Commission members on other activities that are underway and/or planned.

Evidence-Based Practices – Our workgroup believes it is important to have common criteria for evidence-based and evidence-informed practices. Many of the communities we have talked to in our research about current prevention efforts underway across the state are using criteria developed by the federal Administration on Children, Youth and Families for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention grantees. We are aware that Juvenile Justice professionals are using criteria developed in conjunction with faculty at UNL. Our workgroup did a crosswalk between the two sets of criteria and found that, although different terminology is used, the criteria are very similar.

Inventory of Evidence-Based and Evidence Informed - Our workgroup reviewed an inventory of evidence-based programs currently being implemented in the communities implementing Alternative Response. (See attached listings.)

Inventory of Existing Community Collaboration Efforts - Our workgroup plans to work with the Prevention Partnership to identify existing community collaboration efforts by community, county, system and outcomes. This is a first step in ensuring efforts are in alignment and not duplicating other efforts.

Community Listening Sessions - Our workgroup also plans to hold another round of community listening sessions. These sessions will include communities that are implementing Community Response to begin collecting data and information about the results of these prevention efforts and how they are being coordinated with Alternative Response efforts.

**Evidence Based Strategies for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect/Child Well Being
Supported by Community and State Systems**

<i>Age Range</i>	Primary Prevention - Universal Strategies - low risk	Secondary Prevention - "At Risk" Targeted Strategies	Tertiary Prevention - High Need Individual Strategies
<p>The following list of EBP's were identified by community stakeholders during Service Array planning using the following resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEBC – California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse • SAHMSA – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration • OJJDP – Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention • CBCAP – Community Based Child Abuse Prevention checklist 			
Early Childhood			
0 - 2	Parents Interacting with Infants (Dodge, Sarpy)	Nurse Family Partnership (Hall)	
0 - 3		Sixpence (Lancaster, Hall, Dodge, Scottsbluff)	
0 - 5	Circle of Security Parenting (all)	Circle of Security Parenting (all)	Child Parent Psychotherapy (Lancaster, Sarpy, Hall, Scottsbluff)
0 - 5	Parents as Teachers - Early Head Start (Hall, Lancaster)	Healthy Families America/Growing Great Kids Curriculum (Scottsbluff)	
3 to 5		Head Start (all)	
0 - 7		Parent Child Interaction Therapy (Lancaster, Sarpy, Dodge)	
0 - 8	Positive Behavioral Supports and/or Pyramid (all)		
Middle Years			
6 to 11		Strengthening Families (Hall)	
4 to 12		Families and Schools Together (Hall, Lancaster, Scottsbluff)	
5 to 12			Nurturing Parenting Program (Dodge, Lancaster, Hall, Sarpy)
Adolescence			
12 to 17			Aggression Replacement Training (Lancaster, Hall)
12 to 17			Multisystemic Therapy (MST) - (Hall, Lancaster, Sarpy)
13 to 17			Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (Hall)
13 to 17	SANKOFA		
13 to 17	Fourth R (Lancaster)		
All Ages or Adults			
0 - 21			Professional Partners Program/Wraparound(all)
0 to 17		Kids for Keeps (Lancaster, Scottsbluff)	Intensive Family Preservation Services (Hall)
Adults	Motivational Interviewing (Lancaster, Hall, Sarpy)		
5 to 17	Alternatives for Families Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Omaha, Lincoln)		
4 to 18	Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Lancaster, Sarpy, Hall)		
0 to 18			Boys Town Integrated Continuum (In- Home Family Services) - Hall, Dodge, Sarpy
6 to 16			Trauma Systems Therapy (Lancaster, Sarpy, Hall)
6 to 16	Common Sense Parenting (Lancaster, Sarpy, Dodge, Hall)		
26 - 55			WRAP (Lancaster, Sarpy, Hall)
Adults			Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) (Lancaster, Sarpy)
Adults			Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Lancaster, Sarpy, Hall)
Adults			Prolonged Exposure Therapy (Lancaster)

Lead Agency Taskforce Final Recommendations

July 21, 2015

Report to the Nebraska Children's Commission

Nebraska Children's Commission

Lead Agency Taskforce Final Recommendations

July 21, 2015

Background

The Lead Agency Taskforce ("Taskforce") is a group formed by the Nebraska Children's Commission ("Commission") for the purposes of considering the potential role of lead agencies in Nebraska's child welfare system. The group was formed with representation from all three branches of government and other stakeholder organizations. A listing of members is attached as "Appendix A," and a summary of the Taskforce's activities is included as "Appendix B."

Purpose

The Nebraska Children's Commission has been tasked by statute to "consider the potential of contracting with private non-profit entities as a lead agency" (Neb. Rev. State. §43-4204(1)(a)). The statute states that lead agency utilization must be done in such a way to maximize the strengths, experience, skills, and continuum of care of the lead agencies.

The charge of the Taskforce was to look broadly at the options for management of the child welfare system and services across the state with lead agency contracting as one of the options and render opinions for consideration by the Commission, the Governor, and the Health and Humans Services Committee of the Legislature. The Taskforce agreed that this charge does not include the rendering of an opinion as to the operations and outcomes demonstrated by the Nebraska Families Collaborative, the current lead agency in Nebraska, but to look at the big picture of child welfare management across the State.

Foundational Values

The foundational value the Taskforce used to frame its recommendations is to "do no harm." The Taskforce recognizes that change has the potential to disrupt a system that is still trying to achieve stability. Any change made to the child welfare system will have effects on families and children, the stability of the workforce, and the ultimate ability of the system to achieve the mandates of child safety, permanency, and well-being. Crucial elements of systems level work are a focus on people and a family centered philosophy. Change to the child welfare system must be carefully planned, adequately funded, and designed to achieve specific and measurable outcomes.

The Taskforce also framed its work by recognizing that while the State can delegate child welfare functions, it is also held responsible for the care and placement of children who are wards of the state. This report makes recommendations regarding the complex issues

experienced by states implementing the lead agency model. Those in authority to implement a lead agency structure should consider the broader issues of delegating fundamental child welfare responsibilities.

Components of a Seamless System of Care

The Taskforce determined that the child welfare system in Nebraska should be a seamless system of care. The Taskforce identified seven components of a seamless system of care, and developed recommendations to manage the child welfare system through supporting these seven components. These components are (1) Outcomes and Accountability; (2) Clarification of Roles and Responsibility; (3) Quality Case Management Workforce; (4) Trust; (5) Adaptive and Individualized to Children, Families, and Communities; (6) Coordinated and Flexible Service Delivery Model; and (7) Single Data Repository/Warehouse.

Outcomes and Accountability

The first component of a seamless system of care is outcomes and accountability. A seamless system of care must identify and agree upon clearly defined outcomes. This includes mechanisms to hold stakeholders accountable for achieving or not achieving the identified outcomes.

- 1. The Taskforce recognizes the benefits of the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process and recommends that it continue.** Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) – Children and Families Division has implemented a CQI process, including meeting with staff from each service area and the lead agency pilot project to review data and identify strategies for improvement. The CQI process should continue and any lead agency providing case management services should be included in the process.
- 2. Nebraska's child welfare system must make the transition to the new Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) measures as soon as the measures are clarified.** The new CFSR measures better capture the outcomes of the system and the state will be held accountable to these measures.
- 3. The agency providing case management services, whether the State or a lead agency, should be responsible for outcomes.** While other partners in the system should be involved in the attainment of the outcomes, ultimately the agency providing case management must be held accountable for attaining or not attaining outcomes for families and children. If the lead agency model is utilized, the outcomes and responsibility should be included in the Request for Bids (RFB) and contract. Expected outcomes should be uniform for all agencies providing case management.
- 4. If Results Based Accountability (RBA) will be used, it must work for all players in the system.** An RBA framework will look differently for a lead agency than a

contracted service provider. Entities should be held accountable for results that they can impact.

5. **The data that is collected for accountability should be necessary to monitor identified systemic indicators and not require duplicate data entry.** Systemic indicators should be identified to determine what information is necessary and required. Information and data requires caseworker input to collect. Data collection can require large amounts of caseworker time and effort that is spent away from families, and should be minimized as much as possible.
6. **If the lead agency model is utilized, Nebraska must effectively address the challenges to lead agencies accessing Nebraska's existing child welfare information technology system, Nebraska Family On-line Client User System (NFOCUS).** Lead agencies often struggle when lead and public agencies maintain different data and information systems. The lead agency may have invested significant amounts of money in a system that is incompatible, or the existing SACWIS system may not be able to accommodate the needs of the lead agency. Fortunately, other states have tackled this issue and can provide guidance. Some possible solutions include:
 - a. Granting secondary access to lead agency staff, including two levels of access. Case managers need case level access to make quality decisions for the children and families they serve, and the lead agency needs access to aggregate data for an internal CQI process;
 - b. Creating a search function that is accessible by lead agency staff;
 - c. Creating relevant alerts that are available to the lead and public agency staff;
 - d. Including the lead agency in systems improvement processes and focus groups;
 - e. Addressing SACWIS use in the contract between the lead and public agency;
 - f. Making extensive training available to both the lead and public agency employees on the use of the SACWIS;
 - g. Lead and public agencies working together to create a common data dictionary so that codes and definitions are standard statewide.

Clarification of Roles and Responsibility

A seamless system of care has clarified roles and responsibilities for each specific position, agency, and stakeholder. Unclear roles create uncertainty, confusion, and mistrust within the system. Effective relationships are fostered when individuals understand and respect their own and each other's roles. Roles should be designed to serve children and families as efficiently as possible. This section addresses a number of legal party issues between the public agency and lead agency. The Legal Parties Taskforce of the Nebraska Children's

Commission is developing recommendations regarding the roles of other legal parties, but the recommendations in this section are limited to lead agency related roles.

- 1. A seamless transition plan needs to be created and implemented between the initial assessment workers and case managers.** Families involved in the child welfare system need access to services as soon as possible. Delays between initial assessment and case manager engagement delay the seamless provision of necessary services which in turn ultimately delays permanency for child. Communication between the workers must support the seamless system of care, and not create delays. The process of transition should be collaborative and focused on timely access to services. This recommendation should be implemented regardless of lead agency utilization.
- 2. If the lead agency model is to continue, the Legislature must clarify issues of legal custody of children who are state wards.** As per statute, DHHS maintains legal custody of state wards, is responsible for their care, and decision making inherent in case management (Neb. Rev. Stat. §68-1211). Although the lead agency is responsible for daily tasks, important decision making remains with the public agency. For instance, a lead agency caseworker cannot consent to medical treatment.
 - a. Address inefficiencies in legal decision making for state wards.** The caseworker for the lead agency, although appropriately trained and thoroughly familiar with the needs of the family and children, must defer to a DHHS worker with less experience with the family. This structure also contributes to a general confusion on the part of the family about the lead agency caseworker's role. The public agency is in the position of having the responsibility to make the best decision for the family, without the family knowledge and contact of the lead agency worker. Other states have dealt with this issue either through statute or through court order.
 - i. Statutory solutions:** Some States have codified that the lead agency has legal authority over the day-to-day decisions of the family. The State indirectly affects case management through contract requirements and licensing regulation, but the lead agency is given broad authority over the decision making for the family.
 - ii. Judicial solutions:** Other states turn to the judicial branch to determine who should make the legal decisions for vulnerable children who are in the custody of the state. Some states allow the judge the ability to issue a court order giving a caseworker legal authority to assume legal custody of the child. Judges ultimately decide the disposition of the case and have familiarity with the family and child, so it is consistent with the role to allow judges to determine which agency retains legal custody of the child.

However, this option would be unavailable in Nebraska, without a statutory change allowing lead agency caseworkers the ability to take legal custody of a child.

- iii. **Public Agency solutions:** Some public agencies employ caseworkers who monitor the cases managed by the lead agency. These caseworkers are familiar with the cases and have the authority, as public agency employees, to make legal decisions for the child who is a state ward. Often, this caseworker does not have the face-to-face contact or familiarity with the family and child, but in a system with effective communication and well-defined roles, this can be workable. The public agency monitoring caseworker can be present in the courtroom to discuss the case and present the public agency's position.
 - iv. Ultimately, very few states have opted to give lead agencies legal custody of children who are state wards. Under Federal Law and guidelines, the state agency maintains the overall responsibility for the placement and care of the child, including the case plan. Although this does not prohibit the state from delegating case plan activities to a lead agency, it does require significant monitoring and oversight from the public agency. If Nebraska continues the lead agency model, it will be necessary to clarify this issue. Making any changes to the delegation of day-to-day decision making will require thoughtful planning, stakeholder buy-in, and a deliberate implementation process.
- b. **Consider liability issues inherent in a lead agency taking legal custody of a child who is a state ward.** Contracts will need to address how the risk and liability will be allocated. Lead agencies do not have the same level of immunity from liability that a public agency enjoys. Increased levels of responsibility for lead agencies will in turn create increased levels of exposure to risk. The increased risk of liability will have a chilling effect on smaller, community based agencies that do not have the legal or financial resources to respond to litigation. Further research should be conducted to determine if Legislation can be created to relieve lead agencies of this potential liability by extending the immunity enjoyed by the public agency.
3. **If the lead agency model is utilized, the legal party status of the lead agency must be addressed.** Currently, the public agency is a legal party to the juvenile court case, and attorneys for the public agency may attend the hearing, file motions, and act on behalf of the agency. The lead agency does not have legal standing, and may not participate as a party in the court proceedings. In some states with the lead agency

model, there are times when the lead agency involves its own private legal counsel in a proceeding involving a child who is a state ward, including when conflicting interests arise between the state and lead agency, or when a lead agency caseworker is held in contempt of court. This leaves the public agency legal counsel to advocate on behalf of a case plan the agency did not create. Lead agencies incur legal and financial risk and are held responsible for outcomes, and participation in court proceedings could reduce risk and increase outcomes. If the lead agency is given legal custody of the child, it will be necessary for the lead agency to be a party to the case. It is relatively rare for a lead agency to have full legal party status, but some measure of legal standing could alleviate these legal concerns. Nebraska should clarify what level of legal party participation is expected of the public agency and lead agency, and modify statute accordingly.

4. **If the lead agency model is utilized, reduce role duplication as much as possible.** While a lead agency will require oversight, it is imperative that the roles be clearly defined so that the same jobs are not being done at the state and lead agency level. Duplication at the administrative level may be unavoidable. The public agency will have necessary infrastructure such as payroll, human resources, legal and accounting departments. A lead agency, as a separate entity, will require this infrastructure as well. This duplication should be minimized as much as possible.

Quality Case Management Workforce

This includes quality oversight of caseworkers and case managers who serve as representatives to other systems, including the court.

1. **The Lead Agency Taskforce has reviewed the recommendations of the Nebraska Children’s Commission Workforce Workgroup dated March 17, 2015, and supports the recommendations.** This document is attached as “Appendix C”
2. **Caseworker salaries should be increased to attract and retain high quality caseworkers.** While the Workforce Workgroup recommends that “Caseworker salaries should be brought in line with regional averages, taking into account variations in caseworker education, experience, and caseload,” the Lead Agency Taskforce recommends that Nebraska increase the salary so that it exceeds the regional average.
3. **Caseworker salaries should include differentials based on experience, education, proficiency in second languages, attainment of key competencies, and other relevant factors.** The nature of casework requires a high level of education, skills, and field experience. Casework is an extremely complex and difficult vocation that deeply impacts families and children. Casework should not be seen as an entry level position, and allowing for merit pay increases and salary

differentials for education, skills, and other factors allows agencies to attract and retain the best and most qualified candidates.

4. **Case managers must be supported by quality supervisors.** Supervisors play an extremely important role in the child welfare system. They provide necessary support and expertise to case managers. It is important to employ supervisors with Masters of Social Work degrees, and encourage the attainment of Masters of Social Work Degrees. Quality supervisors contribute to retention, job satisfaction, and improved outcomes for children and families.
5. **System stakeholders support caseworkers.** The support of stakeholders impacts caseworker retention. Caseworkers may be employed by a public or lead agency, but come into contact with stakeholders from all systems. For instance, caseworkers spend a significant amount of time in court, and therefore need the support of attorneys, judges, and Guardians ad Litem. Another key component is quality supervisor support for case managers.
6. **Caseworkers should not be required to make unnecessary or duplicate data entries to report data.** This recommendation has been discussed as a part of Outcomes and Accountability, but its impact on caseworkers merits discussion under this component. Casework attracts individuals who are dedicated to families and children, and wish to spend their time actively helping their clients. Many caseworkers struggle to balance work and life while meeting the demands of the families they serve. Adding unnecessary or duplicative data-collection and entry further burdens caseworkers.
7. **If the lead agency model is utilized, the contract must include provisions to ensure a quality case manager and supervisor workforce.** The contract should include staffing requirements, and show how the lead agency will use its creativity and flexibility to foster its workforce. The contract should also include training that is consistent with state and federal requirements, but not necessarily the same training utilized by the public agency.
8. **If case management remains a function of the public agency, addressing the restrictions to increasing caseworker salary and allowing for caseworker salary differentials should be a priority.** Currently, public agency caseworkers are hired at the same rate, regardless of the experience or education of the caseworker. The pay structure presents a challenge in recruiting skilled workers. A case worker may be graduating college with a bachelor's degree and no field experience and another may have a Master's in Social Work and years of field experience, yet will be offered the same pay for the same job. The effect is that the position of caseworker is regarded as an entry level job, when it in fact requires significant field experience and education. Under the current salary structure, caseworkers are hired at the same rate for the same position. Department of Administrative Services rules and Union

contract requirements should be examined and possibly re-structured to allow for changes in salary structure.

Trust

A seamless system of care must include trust supported by follow through, consistency, and champions for the child and family. Families, judges, attorneys, providers, caseworkers, and all stakeholders must trust each other and the system.

- 1. Trust is enhanced and supported through transparency at all levels.** Trust can be achieved when it is clear that each stakeholder is open and honest. Transparency is necessary to achieve accountability for measures. Policies and practices should enhance and support transparency in the child welfare system. Trust cannot be mandated, but can be created by consistent achievement of outcomes.
- 2. The responsibilities of each role are clearly defined and understood.** Each role and its expectations must be clear at every point in the system. When the responsibilities of each role are clear, stakeholders and families can understand what to expect and how to achieve outcomes.
- 3. DHHS-CFS and any lead agency must have a collaborative and constructive partnership.** The relationship between the public agency and lead agency is key in any successful lead agency model. The public agency is reliant upon the lead agency to create case plans for the vulnerable children in the custody of the state. A close and trusting relationship is necessary to achieve outcomes.

Adaptive and Individualized to Children, Families, and Communities

Each child, family, and community in Nebraska has different strengths and needs. A seamless system of care is able to effectively address the unique needs and enhance existing strengths. Many proponents of the lead agency model note that the private status of lead agencies should allow them to be more flexible and use funds in ways that are not available to the public agency.

- 1. If the lead agency model is utilized, it must support an adaptive and individualized services array and system of care.** If the State does contract out case management, it should expect that the lead agency will develop services, innovate, and use funds for services in ways that the State cannot. The contract should not be for results that the State could produce without a contract. A lead agency must be more innovative and able to provide a more individualized services array than the public agency.
- 2. If the lead agency model is utilized, DHHS-CFS should tailor the Request for Bids to require the bidders to demonstrate how they will be able to change and improve the child welfare system.** The potential lead agency must show how it

would serve the children and families differently while achieving the desired outcomes.

3. **Special attention needs to be paid to the unique needs of each service area, and each service area administrator should be given the necessary flexibility to attend to those needs.** Nebraska is diverse in both geography and population. Each service area has different service needs and resources. Service area administrators have the expertise to understand how to serve the needs of the service area, and should be given the necessary flexibility to achieve outcomes.

Coordinated and Flexible Service Delivery Model

A seamless system of care has a coordinated and flexible service delivery model. The case manager should be the primary representative to the child and the family, ensure the child receives services designed to meet their individual needs, and assist the family in accessing needed services. Service providers need the flexibility to provide the necessary services to children and families without interruption or delay. The system as a whole needs the ability to modulate the services within it.

1. **If the lead agency model is utilized, focus on legal and financial requirements, not process protections.** When lead agencies are held to the same policies and requirements as the public agency, it is difficult to achieve different outcomes. Public agencies often place requirements on lead agencies that are meant to protect the public agency. These process protection policies make flexibility difficult. If the lead agency is being held to the public agency policies, it should be to achieve legal and financial requirements, not process protections for the public agency's benefit.
2. **If the lead agency model is utilized, focus on true outcomes, and not process outcomes.** Process outcomes, like process based protections, limit the flexibility of the lead agency. The lead agency should be responsible for achieving true outcomes for families and children, not for the process they use to achieve outcomes.
3. **If the lead agency model is utilized, allow lead agencies the flexibility to show how they can change and improve the system, and implement the changes.** Lead agencies can be restricted by state policies and rules to the extent that they are unable to operate in an appreciably different way from the State. If lead agencies are not given some measure of flexibility in adherence to state policy, it will be impossible for the lead agency to produce different results.
4. **If the lead agency model is utilized, the state and lead agency must work together to transition cases from initial assessment to ongoing case management.** The state and lead agency must work together from the outset of a family's involvement to coordinate the case plan and begin services as soon as possible for the family.

Singular Data Repository/Warehouse

Decisions throughout all levels of the child welfare system must be made based on timely and accurate information. The system needs mechanisms that allow for the gathering, tracking, analyzing and sharing of essential information in a timely manner. Children and families in the child welfare system are often involved in other systems that have knowledge of and responsibility for other aspects of the child and family's life. A single data repository or warehouse allows for coordination of services through increased information and allows providers access to the information necessary to determine eligibility and need for services. Shared data repositories may also allow for better decision making at the public policy level because more comprehensive information is available. The data repository must include data from all systems that a child may touch, including the Courts, Probation, Medicaid, Developmental Disabilities, Behavioral Health, and Education.

1. **If the lead agency model is utilized, State and lead agency data should be analyzed in the same manner so that the comparison, interpretation and reporting of data is consistent.** All agencies responsible for case management, whether State or lead agency should provide data to the singular data repository. All data should be analyzed consistently, so that accurate comparisons can be made and there are informed decisions made at all levels of the child welfare system.
2. **Common definitions of key measures should be created.** A data dictionary is a necessity for a singular data repository. This allows for the true comparison of data, as it is clear what exactly is being measured.
3. **The way that data is arrived at should be transparent.** Data should be used to measure identified systemic indicators that are clearly defined. All public and lead agencies should be held responsible for the same systemic indicators, and agree on the manner in which data points are determined. This will allow for a consistent understanding of the system's ability to meet outcome measures. This will also prevent public and lead agencies from releasing competing or contradictory data.
4. **Data supports quality case management.** Case level data should be accessible by case managers to support quality decisions for the children and families served.
5. **The data repository should also include a reports feature allowing stakeholders to view their or their organization's performance and make internal system changes.** This allows all stakeholders to monitor their own performance and make necessary system changes to support improved outcomes. Individualized data reports can allow stakeholders to identify areas to improve upon to support the functioning of the child welfare system as a whole.

Summary

The Lead Agency Taskforce has conducted a thorough and thoughtful review of Nebraska's child welfare system, and in addition to the seven components of a seamless system of care, has identified the following three broad summary recommendations:

1. **The Lead Agency Taskforce believes that the lead agency model can be effective if the seven components of a seamless system of care are present.** Regardless of public or lead agency management, these premises must be fulfilled to have a revolutionarily effective child welfare system.
2. **Those in authority for determining whether lead agencies will be utilized should consider the broader issues of whether or not Nebraska should establish contracts which delegate child welfare responsibilities.** Regardless of lead agency utilization, the State remains responsible for the placement and care of children who are state wards.
3. **Case managers and supervisors are the foundation of the child welfare system.** If the foundation of case workers and supervisors is built, the State will have a strong child welfare system regardless of the structure. Workers should be encouraged to make child welfare case work their profession and lifelong career. Child welfare case work should be professionalized through managed caseloads, reduced paperwork and bureaucracy, respectful environments, and valued workers.

Statement of Appreciation

The Taskforce would like to express appreciation for Chairperson Beth Baxter's leadership and vision; and Policy Analyst Bethany Allen's staff support.

Appendix A

Lead Agency Taskforce Members

Name	Title
Beth Baxter	Administrator, Region Three
Jim Blue	President/CEO, CEDARS
Jennifer D. Chrystal-Clark	County Attorney, Douglas County Juvenile Court
Judge Lawrence Gendler	Judge, Sarpy County Juvenile Court
Candy Kennedy-Goergen	Executive Director, Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Kelli Hauptman	Co-Director, Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children at UNL, Center on Children, Families and the Law
Norman Langemach	Private Attorney and Guardian ad Litem
Mary Jo Pankoke	President/CEO, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
RuAnn Root	Director, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of South Central Nebraska

Resources to the Lead Agency Taskforce

Kim Hawekotte	Executive Director, Foster Care Review Office
Julie Rogers	Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare

Appendix B

Lead Agency Taskforce Summary of Activities

Date	Activity
March 6, 2015	The Lead Agency Taskforce (“Taskforce”) holds its first meeting. The meeting is spent in a general discussion about the subject matter, creating a purpose statement, and identifying key values.
March 17, 2015	The Taskforce presents a written update of activities to the Nebraska Children’s Commission (“Commission”). The Commission reaches the consensus that the Taskforce’s work should continue as identified by the Taskforce.
March 24, 2015	The Taskforce holds its second meeting. The meeting is spent creating a structure and framework for creating recommendations. The Taskforce identifies critical system components and issues that need to be addressed by recommendations.
April 1, 2015	Survey created to elicit feedback from the taskforce on the critical system components and other issues to be addressed by recommendations.
April 15, 2015	The Taskforce holds its third meeting. The meeting is spent reviewing the results of the survey. Members identify data and information necessary to create recommendations, and request that the Department of Health and Human Services Children and Family Services Division (DHHS-CFS) and pilot project Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC) send representatives to the next meeting. The Taskforce also requests that the representatives complete the survey.
May 4, 2015	The Taskforce holds its fourth meeting. Representatives from DHHS-CFS and NFC attend to discuss the survey results and provide the task members with information. The Taskforce comes to the consensus that the next meeting should be spent working to create a final report.
May 19, 2015	The Taskforce presents a written update of activities to the Nebraska Children’s Commission.
May 27, 2015	The Taskforce holds its fifth meeting and begins to develop recommendations.
June 30, 2015	The Taskforce holds its sixth meeting. The Taskforce reviews a written draft of information from the previous meeting and develops final recommendations.

Appendix C

Nebraska Children's Commission Workforce Workgroup

May 18, 2015

The Workforce workgroup of the Nebraska Children's Commission has identified two key areas of focus to recruit and retain Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) child welfare caseworkers in Nebraska: increased salary and compensation and the development of career trajectories. Increasing the professionalism and expectations of front line workers and their supervisors is critical to improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care and in the juvenile justice system. Recommendations are listed in priority order.

Role and Importance of Child Welfare Workers

Child welfare caseworkers are critical to the safety, permanency and well-being of children in Nebraska. Caseworkers must be given the tools necessary to effectively perform their jobs and help vulnerable children and families.

Studies abound on the importance of stable and effective caseworkers. The Foster Care Review Office recently cited two studies in its 2014 annual report, noting that caseworker turnover is consistently associated with delays in achieving permanency and increased numbers of placement.

Caseworkers also play a pivotal role in the experience of the child, especially when the child is in an out-of-home placement. Children experiencing the upheaval of being removed from the home need stable and caring adults in their lives. The repeated change of caseworkers removes an important opportunity to provide vulnerable children with much needed stability and certainty.

The average length of tenure for a caseworker in Nebraska is 3.19 years. This not only leaves a vulnerable population of state wards facing the decreased outcomes associated with caseworker changes, but also imposes a significant fiscal cost on the state. Training associated with hiring a new caseworker ranges between \$30,000 and \$36,000.

Salary and Compensation

Improved salary and compensation should include bringing caseworker salaries in line with national averages and creating salary differentials. Salary differentials should be available for performance and education. Performance incentives include an increased salary differential for achieving key competencies in casework. Caseworkers should also continue to receive salary increases when moving from frontline casework to mentor and supervisor roles.

Educational incentives include a salary differential for attaining higher education and loan forgiveness programs. Tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness is a sub-topic of compensation that is closely linked to retention and recruitment. Higher loan forgiveness for caseworkers employed in underserved areas assists in rural communities attracting and retaining child welfare professionals.

Recommendations:

1. Caseworker salaries should be brought in line with regional averages, taking into account variations in caseworker education, experience, and caseload.
2. A loan forgiveness program for attainment of higher education should be established, with higher loan forgiveness for employment in underserved areas and rural areas.
3. A comprehensive evaluation regarding child welfare caseworker professionals should be undertaken by the Legislature and include the issue of caseworker salary in Nebraska.

Education and Professionalism

The role of child welfare caseworker is of critical importance, and should not be considered an entry level position. Caseworkers are in charge of ensuring that families and children receive services and support and making recommendations to the Judge regarding permanency. It is clear that this pivotal role requires attaining high levels of competency through education, training and experience. It is important to encourage caseworkers to attain levels of higher education, including the attainment of a Master's of Social Work. Incentives may include a salary differential for attaining higher education, loan forgiveness programs, or tuition reimbursement.

Recommendations:

1. A comprehensive evaluation regarding child welfare caseworker professionals should be undertaken by the Legislature and include the issue of incentives to encourage the attainment of advanced degrees, including through loan forgiveness programs.

Career Trajectories

Establishment of career trajectories strengthens retention and professional development. Caseworkers should receive increased salaries for performance and supervisory duties. New job classifications can be based on achievement of key competencies with salary increases at each level. Competencies may include the ability to work with specific populations, maintain high-risk caseloads, attain cultural competency, or speak multiple languages.

Recommendations:

1. Career steps should be identified with accompanying salary differentials for:
 - a. Achieving specialized competencies (expertise with specific populations; high risk caseloads; cultural competency; multiple language proficiency);
 - b. When moving from frontline casework to mentor to supervisor roles; and
 - c. Education achievement beyond bachelor's degree.
2. Encourage and support the continued efforts of the DHHS and NFC.

Caseloads

Caseload sizes have dramatic effects for both workers and the families they serve. A burdensome caseload is the natural consequence of increased turnover, which in turn creates even more turnover when workers feel they are unable to appropriately manage their caseloads. Caseloads are not just abstract numbers; each case represents the lives of families and children. When caseworkers are assigned too many cases they are overwhelmed, lose their confidence in their ability to effectively perform their jobs, and children and families suffer the effects.

The Workforce workgroup acknowledges the work that has been done by the Legislature in the important step of creating caseload limits for child welfare case workers. DHHS and pilot project Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC) are required by Neb. Rev. Stat. §68-1207(1) to utilize the workload standards of the Child Welfare League of America. DHHS submits an annual report to the legislature outlining the caseloads of its caseworkers

It is important to perform oversight of these numbers, to ensure compliance. One area that can be improved upon is defining vague terms in the caseload standards. Urban, rural, and mixed urban and rural caseload standards are different, due to the drive time encountered in rural cases. Although the caseloads are different, the terms are not clearly defined. Many caseworkers working in areas defined as “urban,” such as Scottsbluff, also service rural areas and experience significant drive time in managing their caseloads. The workgroup recommends that “rural” and “urban” be defined to be more in line with the caseworker’s experiences of the region served.

Recommendations:

1. Clarify definitions of “urban” and “rural” for purposes of calculating caseloads.
2. Create a technological solution to the complexity of calculating mixed-caseloads.
3. Increase oversight to ensure that statutory caseload limits are followed, and that the caseload limit is reviewed for appropriateness.
4. Utilize legislative oversight to ensure that compliance with the caseloads is maintained.

Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

“Vicarious trauma” and “compassion fatigue” are two terms used interchangeably to describe the secondary trauma experienced by caseworkers who witness or hear about the traumatic experiences of the people they serve. The nature of the profession attracts workers who care deeply about families, so daily exposure to traumatic events or stories can have negative effects on caseworkers. Vicarious trauma causes unhappiness and distress in caseworkers, with negative consequences for the worker’s family life and job performance. Fortunately, there are excellent services and trainings available to help caseworkers prevent and lessen the effects of vicarious trauma.

Recommendations:

1. Make counseling services available to case workers experiencing vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue.
2. Ensure caseworkers are aware of resources to help with vicarious trauma and fatigue, and encourage the utilization of these resources.
3. Encourage the continued efforts of the DHHS and pilot project NFC in this area.

Training and Work Support

An effective social worker has a number of skills and competencies outside of knowledge of the child welfare system, child development, and family dynamics. Key components of the job include the ability of the caseworker to manage his or her time and organize his or her workload, while maintaining a work-life balance. A new caseworker may not have these skills upon entering the workforce. An effective training program should include information on these skills.

Stakeholders have also identified a need to provide critical thinking training for caseworkers. The role and judgment of caseworkers is critical for all families, especially court-involved families. Communication between judges and caseworkers is imperative. Judges need to be able to rely on caseworkers to explain the decisions and recommendations put forth in court. Judges are often unaware of the decision-making tools such as SDM and various assessments that result in the caseworker’s recommendations. Caseworkers need to be able to explain the decision making tool utilized, and how the facts of the case were applied to support the recommendation to the Court.

Recommendations:

1. Training programs for new caseworkers should include professional development in areas such as time management and workload management.

2. Develop and utilize a program to ensure effective communication between judges and caseworkers.
3. Develop and utilize a training program that enhances critical thinking skills.
4. Perform a thorough and comprehensive review of caseworker training and curriculum to ensure that it reflects best practices in the field.
5. Encourage and support the continued efforts of the DHHS and NFC in this area.

Next Steps

After forwarding its recommendations to the Legislature, the workgroup will remain available as a resource to the Legislature and the Nebraska Children's Commission for child welfare and juvenile justice workforce related issues. The Workforce Workgroup requests that a comprehensive evaluation be done to explore the components necessary for a stable, effective and professional child welfare workforce and statutory changes necessary to support the workforce.