

POLICY BRIEF

Transition Planning in Nebraska

FOSTER CARE REFORM LEGAL RESOURCE CENTER

Child Welfare System Accountability Program

Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest

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TRANSITION PLANNING IN NEBRASKA

INTRODUCTION

Research has long supported the importance of locating a safe, stable, and permanent family for children in the foster care system.¹ Federal and state laws mandate ongoing permanency planning, require the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (“NDHHS”) to make reasonable efforts for reunification, and, when children linger in foster care, provide guidance about how best to proceed in the termination of parental rights. Children are to be returned home as soon as is safely possible or, when this is not possible, placed with another family that can provide a permanent home for them. Reasonable efforts are necessary in ensuring that children spend a minimal amount of time in an unstable system that is, by its very nature, meant to be temporary.² Unfortunately, this effort is not always fruitful. Nearly 30,000 youth nationwide exit the foster care system without the support and stability of a permanent family on an annual basis.³

Whereas most children learn the important life skills they need for adulthood from their parent(s) or guardian(s), many older youth in foster care must rely on other sources: Independent Living programs, skill building classes, workshops, etc. As the legal guardian of children in foster care and by virtue of state and federal requirements, NDHHS is responsible for ensuring older youth are connected to these resources. A vital part of this is transition planning: helping youth identify what they need to live independently, how they will meet these needs, who will help them along the way, and what concrete steps they can take.

Historically, state and federal regulations have supported the notion of transition planning but offered limited guidance on best practices. Federally, the Independent Living Initiative,⁴ the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (“FCIA”),⁵ and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (“Fostering Connections”)⁶ established nationwide requirements and provided federal funding to assist older youth preparing to exit the foster care system. In addition, the federal Fostering Connections Act requires that a transition plan be developed during the 90-day period immediately prior to the date on which the youth will reach the age of majority.⁷ In 2011, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 177 which, among other things, codified the transition planning provisions of the federal Fostering Connections Act and provides additional guidance on and oversight of the transition planning process.⁸ Specifically, the statute, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03, requires that NDHHS develop a written independent living transition proposal for every youth age 16 or older in foster care.

Despite federal and state requirements, transition planning in Nebraska does not yet appear to be a consistent practice. This policy brief seeks to encourage the use of transition planning by educating child welfare practitioners on the importance of creating detailed, comprehensive proposals well before youths’ cases are closed by the court. This policy brief will also provide specific tips on what should be included in developmentally appropriate, youth-directed transition proposals and how attorneys can ensure NDHHS is

effectively planning for each and every youth aging out of foster care.

State Data

Nationally, a total of 27,854 youth aged out or exited the foster care system to emancipation in 2010.⁹ The number of youth who aged out of care in Nebraska in 2010 varies slightly by source, ranging from 224 to 282 statewide.^{10, 11, 12} Unfortunately, Nebraska attorneys report that adequate, youth-directed transition planning does not occur for many of these youth. In April of 2012, Nebraska Appleseed created and distributed a survey regarding the implementation of LB 177 to a listserv of local practicing child welfare attorneys. A total of 31 attorneys responded to the survey. Nearly three quarters (72%) disagreed with the statement, “Over the past year, youth I have represented generally have a written independent living transition proposal.” When transition proposals *were* included, the majority of attorneys surveyed indicated that they did not effectively and comprehensively address the areas of education (52%), employment (55%), health (71%), finances (71%), housing (55%), relationships (74%), or adult services (84%). See *LRC Survey Results: Implementation of LB 177* for the complete report.

LAW ON TRANSITION PLANNING

Federal Law

The history of transition planning for older youth in foster care is best understood by looking at three key pieces of federal legislation: the Independent Living Initiative,¹³ the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999,¹⁴ and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.¹⁵

In 1986, Congress enacted the Independent Living Initiative as a part of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.¹⁶ Congress’ intent in passing the Independent Living Initiative was to assist “[s]tates and localities in establishing and carrying out programs designed to assist children, with respect to whom foster care maintenance payments are being made by the State under this part and who have attained the age of 16.”¹⁷ However, more than a decade after the Independent Living Initiative was enacted, it became clear that there were substantial shortcomings in the effort to implement independent living services for older youth in foster care.¹⁸

In 1999, Congress recognized that older youth in foster care continued to have difficulties transitioning out of foster care and passed the Foster Care Independence Act.¹⁹ The FCIA increased the amount of available federal funding to states from 70 million to 140 million²⁰, modernized the formula used to determine reimbursement, and also required that states use federal Title IV-E training funds to train adoptive and foster parents, workers in group homes, and case managers to help address issues that youth face when transitioning out of care.²¹ The FCIA also increased states’ accountability by requiring the submission of a state plan detailing services available to youth and also by requiring the submission of data to the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services (“HHS”).²² Under the FCIA, states are required to provide a broad array of transition services to youth at least 16 years of age and youth who have aged out of care and are under the age of 21.²³ The FCIA does not mandate that a state provide specific services but instead authorizes a broad range of services, including those related to housing assistance, basic living skills, and medical care for youth up to the age of 21.²⁴ The FCIA gives states the option of making former foster youth eligible for Medicaid until the age of 21 and using up to 30% of their federal funding to pay for room and board.²⁵ The FCIA ensures that state programs serve a wide spectrum of youth, use objective eligibility criteria, and cooperate in national evaluations of the program.²⁶

In October of 2008, U.S. Congress unanimously passed and President George W. Bush signed into law the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008.²⁷ Among other things, this law requires that case plans for youth 16 or older must include a written or recorded description of programs that will help youth transition from foster care to independent living.²⁸ The Fostering Connections Act also requires that services available to assist youth transitioning to independent living be discussed at permanency hearings and that caseworkers meet with their assigned youth to finalize a written transition plan at least 90 days before the youth reaches the age of majority in their state.²⁹ The transition plan also must be personalized at the direction of the child and be “as detailed as the child may elect.”³⁰ The transition plan must include options for the youth related to housing, health insurance, education, community supports, and employment services.³¹ Finally, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (“the Affordable Care Act”) amended the Fostering Connections Act so as to require that transition plans include information about designating someone to make healthcare decisions on behalf of youth, if they become unable to do so.³²

State Law

The history of transition planning for older youth in foster care in Nebraska is best understood by looking at two key pieces of legislation: LB 103³³ and LB 177.³⁴

In 1993, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 103, which amended Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-285(2) to provide that “all youth age 16 and older must have an Independent Living Plan based on an assessment of their needs and strengths.”³⁵ Following the enactment of LB 103, Nebraska created several programs and broad standards to govern the content of the Independent Living Plan mandated by the statute. Nebraska promulgated regulations describing the case planning requirements³⁶ and services available to older youth in 1998.³⁷ These regulations reference NDHHS’ “Independent Living Services Guidebook,” which states that the Independent Living Plan requires a written description of the programs available to the youth, to include the youth’s goals for employment, education, financial support, housing, and transportation arrangements.³⁸ The Independent Living Plan also requires that the youth meet with a “Protection and Safety Worker” and “all of the people important to the youth” to discuss the youth’s living arrangement, employment, education plan, and other aspects of the youth’s life prior to aging out of the system.³⁹ According to NDHHS’s “Independent Living Services Guidebook,” programs available to older youth in Nebraska include Transitional Living Programs (“TLP”), the Preparation for Adult Living Services (“PALS”) program, the Education and Training Vouchers (“ETV”) Program, and the Former Ward Program.⁴⁰

390 Neb. Admin Code § 6-006 - INDEPENDENT LIVING

Independent living may be the permanency objective for a 16-year-old youth whose best interest is served by being self-sufficient. Services to prepare wards for independent living will be directed toward a goal or goals that will be included in a case plan and written service agreement. (See Other Permanency Objectives Guidebook, Independent Living Section II for goals, alternative services, written service agreement, case plan and process.) This policy section addresses services for wards with a permanency objective of independent living. See 390 NAC 5-000, Ongoing Services, for preparation for adulthood services.

In May of 2011, the Nebraska Legislature passed and Governor Dave Heineman signed into law LB 177, which is codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03.⁴¹ The statute codified several key provisions of the federal Fostering Connections Act into state statute, including the provision requiring that older youth in foster care have a transition plan in place as they transition to independent living.⁴² Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 requires NDHHS to develop a written independent living transition proposal “at the direction and involvement of the child to transition from foster care to adulthood.”⁴³ Although Nebraska law has required written plans since at least 1993, LB 177 statutorily defined what must be included within the transition planning procedure and made the process more youth-directed.⁴⁴ For example, the written transition proposal pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 must be personalized based on youths’ needs and include, at the minimum, plans for their education, employment services and other workforce supports, health and health care coverage, financial assistance, housing, relationship development, and adult services, if the youth is reasonably likely to be eligible and need such services.⁴⁵ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 also requires that a transition team assist youth in developing and reviewing transition proposals.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 requires that transition proposals be updated and reviewed at every permanency hearing, that proposals describe how youth can access higher education if youth are interested in doing so, that final transition proposals identify how youths’ housing situations will be addressed, and that youth are given a copy of their birth certificate and social security card before their nineteenth birthday.⁴⁷ The juvenile court is authorized by statute to approve the submitted proposal, modify the proposal, or order that an alternative plan be developed if it is in the youth’s best interests.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the transition proposal is considered a “working document” that must be reviewed by the juvenile court at “every permanency or review hearing.”⁴⁹

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 - Written independent living transition proposal; development; contents; transition team; department; duties.

(1) When a child placed in foster care turns sixteen years of age or enters foster care and is at least sixteen years of age, a written independent living transition proposal shall be developed by the Department of Health and Human Services at the direction and involvement of the child to prepare for the transition from foster care to adulthood. The transition proposal shall be personalized based on the child's needs. The transition proposal shall include, but not be limited to, the following needs:

- (a) Education;
- (b) Employment services and other workforce support;
- (c) Health and health care coverage;
- (d) Financial assistance, including education on credit card financing, banking, and other services;
- (e) Housing;
- (f) Relationship development; and
- (g) Adult services, if the needs assessment indicates that the child is reasonably likely to need or be eligible for services or other support from the adult services system.

(2) The transition proposal shall be developed and frequently reviewed by the department in collaboration with the child's transition team. The transition team shall be comprised of the child, the child's caseworker, the child's guardian ad litem, individuals selected by the child, and individuals who have knowledge of services available to the child.

(3) The transition proposal shall be considered a working document and shall be, at the least, updated for and reviewed at every permanency or review hearing by the court.

(4) The final transition proposal prior to the child's leaving foster care shall specifically identify how the need for housing will be addressed.

(5) If the child is interested in pursuing higher education, the transition proposal shall provide for the process in applying for any applicable state, federal, or private aid.

(6) On or before the date the child reaches nineteen years of age, the department shall provide the child a certified copy of the child's birth certificate and facilitate securing a federal social security card when the child is eligible for such card. All fees associated with securing the certified copy shall be waived by the state.

Case Law

Nebraska

At the time of this policy brief's release, there are no known Nebraska appellate court opinions that have directly addressed the issue of the enforceability of transition planning requirements for older youth in foster care in Nebraska. However, there have been several appellate cases that have recognized that a plan of independent living was in the best interests of the youth.⁵⁰ The Nebraska Supreme Court has also discussed what independent living services are available to older foster youth in Nebraska.⁵¹

Other Jurisdictions

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York upheld an order of a lower court enjoining the State of New York from breaching its statutory duty to provide services that adequately prepare youth for independent living and adequately supervise youth that have aged out of the system.⁵² Recently, the New York State Supreme Court approved the settlement of a class action lawsuit on behalf of youth who are aging out of New York's foster care system and have been denied assistance in finding appropriate housing resources.⁵³ The settlement requires the New York City Agency for Children's Services to create a specialized unit to ensure older youth receive housing assistance and youth under the age of 21 that have been discharged from foster care receive supervision from the Agency.⁵⁴ Several other jurisdictions have also noted the importance of preparing older youth for their transition from foster care to adulthood.⁵⁵

TRANSITION PLANNING: SETTING UP YOUTH FOR SUCCESS

It is the caseworker's role to facilitate and engage youth in the transition planning process.⁵⁶ NDHHS and its contractors are ultimately responsible for presenting the written transition proposal to the court; however, guardians ad litem and other case professionals (e.g. attorneys, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, etc.) play a vital role in participating in and overseeing this process. Guardians ad litem are required under Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 to be included in youths' transition teams⁵⁷ and should provide ongoing input into the creation of written transition proposals. If guardians ad litem or other case professionals have concerns about the transition planning process or if their assigned youth lack written proposals, they can and should intervene.

Before the Plan

Preparation

Prior to beginning the transition planning process, it is important for case professionals to have an understanding of adolescent development.⁵⁸ A growing body of research has shown that the brain growth beginning in puberty continues well into the mid-20s. In fact, the frontal lobes, responsible for controlling reasoning, decision-making, judgment, and impulse control, are the very last parts of the brain to develop. This can explain why traits like indecision, impulsiveness, and rebelliousness are so evident during adolescence: it's simply how the teenage brain is programmed to operate.⁵⁹ Expecting 18- and 19-year-olds to venture out on their own without trouble is like expecting them to work against human development.

For this reason, communication is key in helping youth understand the importance of planning for their transition. Case professionals need to explain these challenges in a language young people can understand.⁶⁰ "Discharged from foster care," "Former Ward," and even "permanency" are used plentifully in the professional world of child welfare but aren't exactly universal terms. Taking the time to explain the concepts, offer a thorough overview of the options available, and provide rundowns of key programs (e.g. Former Ward program, Section 8, SNAP) may mean the difference between financial stability and living paycheck to paycheck.

Youth must not only have a clear understanding of the options available to them—they must be actively involved in every step of actually developing their transition proposal.⁶¹ Empowering youth to direct the planning process is imperative.⁶² After all, they're the ones who will be putting it to practice.

Assessment

Assessment is the first step of setting youth up for a successful transition.⁶³ An initial assessment by the youth and case professionals of the youth's needs and developmental abilities help gauge what supports and services are necessary to better prepare youth for adulthood.⁶⁴ Such an assessment should be conducted before creating the transition proposal so the results can be used while setting short- and long-term goals. The assessment should be ongoing and repeated several times prior to discharge to measure the impact of efforts made and to address any needs highlighted by the initial assessment.⁶⁵ Again, NDHHS caseworkers (or its contractors) are ultimately responsible for facilitating or arranging for the assessment process with their assigned youth. All other case professionals, especially those who are members of the youth's transition team, are tasked with ensuring this important step is not forgotten.

The Casey Life Skills (CLS) assessment is a popular tool to assess strengths and opportunities for growth in the areas of healthy relationships, work and study habits, planning and goal-setting, using community resources, daily living activities, budgeting, computer literacy, and permanency. The CLS assessment can be accessed free of charge at www.caseylifeskills.force.com. Professionals are able to create a free service provider account to send multiple online assessments to multiple youth. More importantly, youth can create their own account and can take additional assessments in areas such as homelessness, GLBTQ, education, and healthy pregnancy.

Transition Teams

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 requires that transition teams be comprised of the youth, the caseworker, the guardian ad litem, individuals selected by the youth, and other individuals who are knowledgeable about available services.⁶⁶ To truly be meaningful, however, all of the key people in youths' lives need to play a role in the transition process: foster parents, birth parents and other relatives, and other supportive adults and peers.⁶⁷ In particular, those who make a commitment to continue their relationships with youth after they exit the foster care system should be involved. Case professionals can guide this process, but youth should be empowered to develop the final list.⁶⁸

One of the underlying principles of Fostering Connections and, consequentially, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 is the importance of permanent connections. Permanency should not only be encouraged in the development of specific goals and plans but also throughout the more general planning process.⁶⁹ As a result of being in the foster care system, many youth need help connecting or re-connecting with siblings and other relatives, as well learning to trust that relationships can be permanent. Assisting youth in gathering a "team" of adults, including relatives, who are important to the youth and supportive of his/her efforts is one way to further this focus on encouraging permanent relationships.⁷⁰ The presence of these individuals provides youth with a sense of support while also maintaining a focus on permanency throughout the planning process. Additionally, steps

needed to reach youths' goals will be more practical and attainable with supportive adults present to provide direction and guidance. Youth need a great deal of assistance in preparing to move from the state's custody to living on their own, and members of the transition team must be prepared to take responsibility in helping youth meet their goals. Clear lines of accountability are a necessity.⁷¹

Youth Inventories

Completing a youth inventory prior to case closure can help ensure that youth have possession of the many important documents they will need to be successful as they venture out on their own.⁷² This inventory should consist of fundamental necessities like the youth's social security card and certified birth certificate, but also of commonly neglected items, such as important contact information – including those of the youth's siblings, as he/she will no longer have a caseworker to facilitate contact – and copies of completed applications for public assistance and/or financial aid.⁷³ A lock box or file folder for youth to easily store and protect these documents is another important piece of this inventory.⁷⁴ Youth inventories utilized by individual programs range vastly in their content and level of comprehensiveness. The attached *Youth Inventory*, created by Nebraska Appleseed, offers one example of items a youth inventory should include and can be utilized by youth, guardians ad litem, CASA volunteers, and/or other case professionals in practice.

Transition Proposals

There is no concrete example of how an ideal transition proposal should look or what its contents should contain. Several states have created templates for caseworkers to utilize in transition planning with older youth in care, but Nebraska has not yet done this. National examples are also few and far between. FosterClub, a nonprofit national network for youth in foster care, offers several free resources on their website, including a Transition Toolkit free for the general public to copy, adapt, distribute, and transmit (available at www.fosterclub.com/files/transition_toolkit_v3.pdf). It is important to mention that this Toolkit is not all-encompassing; in fact, it does not offer a section on adult services, which is a required piece of transition planning under Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03. Additionally, youth may have individual needs that go beyond what FosterClub's Transition Toolkit can offer. Case professionals must be mindful of this, should they choose to utilize this template with older youth in care.

Many agencies across the U.S., including NDDHS, have internal checklists they utilize when transition planning with youth. Nebraska Appleseed has attached an additional *Transition Proposal Checklist* for youth, guardians ad litem, CASA volunteers, and/or other case professionals to use in further guiding this process. Please note that this checklist is meant to supplement—not replace—youths' written transition proposals and prompt discussion about youths' needs. It is no way a comprehensive list of the needs all youth will have as they enter adulthood; thus, there are several blank lines in each section for youth and their transition team members to add additional needs.

As previously mentioned, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 requires that transition proposals include specific plans related to education, employment, physical and mental health, financial assistance, housing, relationship development, and adult services (if needed). We will now discuss what content should be included in each of these sections.

Education

The section should discuss youths' current educational attainment and what, if any, plans they have for continued educational development.⁷⁵ Specific goals and plans for continued education or vocational training should be set.⁷⁶ If the youth is interested in pursuing higher education, this section must discuss the process to apply for financial aid.⁷⁷ Specifically, youth should be assisted in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application and applying for the Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) and Former Ward programs.⁷⁸ If the youth is interested in immediately joining the workforce, this section should address any educational needs in the career/employment planning process (e.g. trade school, certifications needed, etc.).⁷⁹

Employment services and other workforce support

This section addresses youths' current employment status and future career goals. Again, specific steps discussing how these goals may be achieved should be included. Case professionals should assist in identifying services and resources in the community that will support youth in reaching their goals. Youth should also receive guidance in creating a resume documenting any past work experience and completing a sample job application.⁸⁰ Additionally, case professionals should assist youth in expunging or sealing any juvenile record that may prevent future employment.⁸¹

Health and health care coverage

This section should address plans to ensure youth maintain health care coverage after leaving care and has the knowledge and ability to meet their own physical, dental, vision, and mental health needs.^{82, 83} Case professionals should assist youth with a plan to either remain with their current medical professionals or to switch care providers.⁸⁴ Youth should have a clear understanding of where they can go and/or who they can call if and when health issues arise (e.g. contact information of their medical professionals, Medicaid eligibility options, contact information of local free and/or sliding scale health clinics, etc.).⁸⁵ Youth should also receive copies of relevant medical records and diagnoses, if any.

Financial assistance, including education on credit card financing, banking, and other services

This section should focus on assisting youth in creating a plan for budgeting, ensuring youth are set up for success in the area of money management (e.g. checking account and savings account, copies of credit reports, budgeting education),⁸⁶ and educating youth about financial issues and available services (e.g. differences between debit and credit cards, banking and investment options, developing good credit history, dangers of

credit cards, how to prevent identity fraud, etc.).⁸⁷ Because many youth have been victims of identity theft while in care, it is also important that a credit history is obtained and, if necessary, the youth be assisted in credit repair before leaving care.

Housing

This section discusses the specific plan for housing after youth exit foster care.⁸⁸ Case professionals should assist youth in arranging for safe, stable, and affordable housing that youth can be expected to maintain for at least one year.⁸⁹ Discharge to a homeless shelter is NOT an acceptable plan.⁹⁰ This process should include the creation of a budget to ensure the youth is able to save enough for the deposit and first month's rent prior to exiting care,⁹¹ along with educating the youth on various housing resources (Section 8 vouchers, public housing, subsidized housing, etc.).^{92,93} Also important in this section is the identification of a back-up housing plan if the original plan falls through.⁹⁴ Again, a homeless shelter is not an acceptable back-up plan.

Relationship development

This section should address plans and efforts made to assist youth in establishing and maintaining lifelong connections to supportive, caring adults.^{95,96} This includes continuing to explore the possibility of permanency in the form of adoption, guardianship, and/or reunification, when safe and appropriate. It is also important to recognize youths' connections to their biological family (especially sibling relationships) and cultivate those relationships prior to discharge from foster care, when safe and appropriate.⁹⁷ Particularly in situations where youth plan to live with a biological relative, fostering these relationships prior to their exit from care may better prepare both parties for what to expect. Connections to community resources and other plans to remain active in pursuing interests or hobbies in the community (e.g. church, cultural, extracurricular activities) should also be explored and addressed.⁹⁸

Adult services, if the needs assessment indicates that the child is reasonably likely to need or be eligible

This section should address types of adult assistance that could benefit youth upon exit from the foster care system. This may include public assistance or other resources available to adults in the community. Also included in this section should be planning efforts to ensure youth with disabilities are set up for success after exiting care.⁹⁹ In particular, this section should document specific services and resources available, such as applying for SNAP, TANF, SSI/disability income assistance, and other adult services.

Other

Thorough transition plans should also address transportation.¹⁰⁰ If youth do not yet have their driver's license or do not have regular access to a vehicle, adults should ensure that youth have a clear ability to use public transportation in their community. This section may also address plans to enroll youth in a driver's education course, if they have not yet completed one.¹⁰¹

Educating youth on basic life skills is also an important part of transition planning.¹⁰² Ideally, this is an ongoing process that begins long before youth venture out on their own. Case professionals must ensure youth have opportunities to learn the basic, everyday skills that will set them up for success later in life.¹⁰³

Summary

Each transition proposal is meant to be an individualized approach to a universal need. No two proposals should be the same. It is vital to involve and empower youth to guide the process and decide upon the content of their transition proposal.¹⁰⁴ In a few short years, these youth will be the primary guiding forces behind implementation of their plan; thus, youth must be on board. Regularly checking in with youth helps gauge their level of satisfaction with their plan. Case professionals can accomplish this by asking questions like: Do you think this plan will help you successfully transition to adulthood? Is anything missing from the plan? What do you like about your plan? What do you not like? What else do *you* need to have a smooth transition from foster care to adulthood?¹⁰⁵

When Transition Planning Doesn't Happen

Guardians ad litem can and should actively assist youth throughout the transition process. Attorneys should offer their knowledge of community resources and opportunities to older youth in foster care as the transition team, with guidance from the youth, begins to develop the transition proposal. Most importantly, attorneys should ensure that the juvenile court and NDHHS continue to meet legal requirements throughout the life of the case. When a transition plan has not been developed in a timely manner or is not being reviewed at every permanency and review hearing, the attorney should bring the issue to the attention of the juvenile court, as the juvenile court has the ability to “order the department to prepare and file with the court a proposed plan for the care, placement, services, and permanency which are to be provided to such juvenile and his or her family.”¹⁰⁶ In addition, Nebraska’s statutory scheme requires action by NDHHS and the juvenile court throughout the transition planning process, and it is essential that the requirements be met.¹⁰⁷ If necessary to enforce the rights of youth, attorneys facing resistance from NDHHS may consider requesting an order to show cause and subsequently a motion to hold NDHHS in contempt for failure to comply with the statutory requirements.¹⁰⁸

AVAILABLE SERVICES IN NEBRASKA

Youth in foster care face significant challenges that make the transition to adulthood difficult. Support for youth aging out of the foster care system is limited and often fails to address basic needs. These youth are less likely to obtain safe and affordable housing, complete their education, maintain employment, and obtain access to medical services.¹⁰⁹

In an effort to improve the likelihood that youth transitioning out of foster care will become productive members of society, community resources must be plentiful and readily available. Only through collaboration with community organizations will youth be able to take the lead in empowering themselves in building a brighter future. The following is a list of services currently available to provide guidance and assistance to

Nebraska youth transitioning out of foster care. This list is not comprehensive but may offer a place to start in connecting youth to services within their community.

Statewide

Project Everlast: Utilizes community resources to improve youths' opportunities and networks for housing, transportation, health care, education, employment, daily living, personal and community engagement, policy training, and education. Individual councils are located in Omaha, Lincoln, Norfolk, Grand Island, North Platte, Scottsbluff, the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) – Kearney, and the YRTC – Geneva. Any youth who has ever been in foster care is able to become a member of Project Everlast. Learn more about this service at: www.nebraskachildren.org/what/project_everlast/

Youth Connection Newsletter: This newsletter written/influenced by members of Project Everlast provides opportunities for youth with experience in foster care to get connected and stay involved through poetry, recipes, articles, stories about young people, and event information. Learn more about this service at: www.nebraskachildren.org/what/projecteverlastomaha/youth_connection_newsletter.html

Need Based Fund: Created by Project Everlast to assist youth with foster care experience when all other financial funding has been exhausted. Youth do not need to be members of Project Everlast to apply. Learn more about this service at: www.nebraskachildren.org/what/projecteverlastomaha/need_based_fund.html

Rent Wise: Provides education to help renters be successful in obtaining and keeping rental housing. Learn more about this service at: www.rentwise.org

Nebraska Friends of Foster Care: Offers grants to help cover the costs of extracurricular activities or other unmet needs of children and youth in foster care, such as school supplies, educational assistance, sports and school activity fees, summer camps, and cultural activities. Learn more about this service at: www.ne-friends.org

Preparation for Adult Living Services (PALS): Serves youth ages 17 to 21 who are currently in foster care or who were discharged to independent living after their 18th birthday. This program offers guidance and support for youth on their journey into independence. PALS Specialists are located throughout the state, with the exception of Omaha. Learn more about this service at: <http://www.central-plains.org/pals.htm>

Southeast Service Area

CEDARS Bridges Transitional Living Program: Serves homeless youth or those exiting foster care ages 16 to 21 by offering supervised, community-based apartment living. CEDARS staff help youth continue their education, develop essential life skills, gain and maintain employment, and develop long-lasting support systems. Learn more about this service at: www.cedars-kids.org

Eastern Service Area

Branching Out: Assists youth ages 14 to 24 who are currently in foster care or alumni of foster care with preparation services, transition services, intensive independent living services, and/or supportive independent living services. Branching Out supports youth in meeting individualized goals that will better prepare them for adulthood. Learn more about this service at: www.omahahomeforboys.org/programs-2/independent-living/

Youth Emergency Services (YES) Transitional Living Program: Offers apartment-style living and case management services for runaway and homeless youth ages 16 to 21. A short-term emergency shelter is also available for youth ages 16 to 18 who are in crisis. Learn more about this service at: www.yesomaha.org

Urban League of Nebraska: Provides employment opportunities, education and career preparation, and other services to youth ages 15 to 21. Learn more about this service at: www.urbanleagueneb.org

Opportunity Passport™: Offers financial education and matched savings to assist youth with foster care experience in saving for certain asset purchases and becoming financially capable. Learn more about this service at: www.nebraskachildren.org/what/projecteverlastomaha/opportunity_passport.html

Western Service Area

Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska (CAPWN): Offers a Transitional Living Program for homeless, pregnant, and parenting youth ages 16 to 21 and temporary Host Homes Outreach Services for runaway or homeless youth. Learn more about this service at: www.capwn.org

Central Service Area

No additional services are known at this time.

Northern Service Area

No additional services are known at this time.

CONCLUSION

Transition planning is absolutely critical in setting youth up for success as they exit foster care and enter adulthood. Written transition proposals are required by Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 for all youth ages 16 and older, and federal law also requires that plans be finalized 90 days before exiting care; however, this does not yet appear to be common practice in Nebraska. Attorneys and guardians ad litem can encourage this process by providing education on the requirements of Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 and advocating for practical, comprehensive written plans that meet the needs of older youth in foster care.

Please contact Nebraska Appleseed's Foster Care Reform Legal Resource Center at (402) 438-8853 or toll free at 800-845-3746 if you have a case related to this issue or for more information about the process of transition planning for older youth in foster care.

ENDNOTES

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- ³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *The AFCARS Report*, available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report18.htm
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- ⁵ Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, Pub. L. No. 106-169, 113 Stat. 1822, 1823 (1999).
- ⁶ Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-351, 122 Stat. 3949 (2008).
- ⁷ 42 U.S.C. § 675(5)(H) (2009).
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- ¹⁰ Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, *2011 Summit for Youth Permanency: Statewide Profile*, available at http://www.nebraskachildren.org/what/project_everlast/summit.html
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- ¹⁶ Independent Living Initiatives, Pub. L. No. 99-272, §12307 (1986).
- ¹⁷ *Id.* (codified at 42 U.S.C. § 677(a)(1986) (note that the program initially provided reimbursement only to Title IV-E eligible youth but expanded in 1988 to include youth that were not eligible for Title IV-E reimbursement.)) see Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), "Brief history of federal child welfare financing legislation," July 2003, <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/financinghistory.htm>
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Services and Monitoring of States' Independent Living Programs 7 (Nov. 2004), available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/250/244829.pdf>

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ 42 U.S.C. § 677(b)(2) (2000).

²⁷ Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-351, 122 Stat. 3949 (2008). (codified at 42 U.S.C. § 675 (2009)).

²⁸ 42 U.S.C. § 675(1)(D) (2009).

²⁹ 42 U.S.C. § 675(5)(H) (2009); See also U.S. Dept. HHS Program Instruction ACYF-CB-PI-10-11 (July 9, 2010), available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/2010/pi1011.htm (“Therefore, we expect the title IV-E agency to use the time well in advance of the 90-day period to prepare and fully engage a youth in his or her transition plan development.”)

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-148, 124 Stat. 119 §2955(a) (codified at 42 U.S.C. § 675 (5)(H) (2011)).

³³ 1993 Neb. ALS 103 (codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-285(2) (1993)).

³⁴ 2011 Neb. ALS 177 (codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 (2011)).

³⁵ Independent Living Services Guidebook, available at http://dhhs.ne.gov/children_family_services/Guidebooks/Independent%20Living%20Services%20Guidebook.pdf

³⁶ 390 Neb. Admin. Code § 5-004.02A.

³⁷ 390 Neb. Admin Code § 6-006 et seq.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.* (The Independent Living Services Guidebook provides a detailed account of the benefits available to youth under each independent living program.)

⁴¹ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 (2011).

⁴² Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03(1) (2011).

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03 (2011).

⁴⁵ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03(1)(a)—(f) (2011).

⁴⁶ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03(2) (2011) (“The transition team shall be comprised of the child, the child’s caseworker, the child’s guardian ad litem, individuals selected by the child, and individuals who have knowledge of services available to the child.”)

⁴⁷ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03(6) (2011).

⁴⁸ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-285(2) (2011).

⁴⁹ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03(3) (2011).

⁵⁰ *In re Interest of Sarah K.*, 258 Neb. 52, 602 N.W.2d 780 (1999); See also *In re Interest of T.T.*, 18 Neb. App. 176, 779 N.W.2d 602 (2009).

⁵¹ *In re Interest of Antonio S.*, 270 Neb. 792, 708 N.W.2d 624 (2005).

⁵² *Palmer v. Cuomo*, 1 21 A.D.2d 194, 503 N.Y.S.2d 20 (1986) (holding that seven foster children that had been discharged to independent living were not adequately prepared for independent living were entitled to declaratory, injunctive, and monetary relief from the State of New York).

⁵³ *D.B. et. al v. Richter*, Index No. 402759/11(judicially approved settlement requiring New York City to assist youth aging out of foster care with housing).

⁵⁴ *Id.*

- ⁵⁵ *L.Y. v. Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services*, 696 So.2d 430, 22 Fla. L. Weekly D1643 (1997) (concurring opinion stressing that the Florida Legislature address issues that face foster youth as they age out of the foster care system); See also *Division of Family Services v. N.S.*, Family Court of Delaware Sussex County, Not Reported in A.3d (2011) (recognizing that the Fostering Connections Act requires the State to take an active role in ensuring the child’s educational need are met).
- ⁵⁶ Neb. Admin Code. § 5-004.02B (1998) (“Case planning is the responsibility of the worker with the active involvement of the child and family and the members of the team supporting services to the family.”)
- ⁵⁷ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03(2) (2011).
- ⁵⁸ Walters, D., Zanghi, M., Ansell, D., Armstrong, E., & Sutter, K. (2010), *Transition Planning with Adolescents: A Review of Principles and Practices Across Systems*, available at <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/transition-planning-with-adolescents.pdf>
- ⁵⁹ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2011), *The Adolescent Brain—New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care*, available at <http://jimcaseyouth.org/adolescent-brain%E2%80%94new-research-and-its-implications-young-people-transitioning-foster-care>
- ⁶⁰ Allen, M. (2005), *Teens Aging Out of Foster Care in Oregon: A Guide to Transition Planning for Caseworkers, Judges and Advocates*, available at <http://www.jrplaw.org/Documents/Teens Aging Out of Foster Care in Oregon.pdf>
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- ⁶⁵ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *Youth-led Planning*, available at <http://www.jimcaseyouth.org/youth-led-planning>
- ⁶⁶ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-1311.03(2) (2011)
- ⁶⁷ Meruvia, R. T. (2011), *Practice Perspectives: Engaging Young People in their Transition Planning*, available at <http://www.socialworkers.org/assets/secured/documents/practice/engaging%20young%20people%20in%20transition.pdf>
- ⁶⁸ FosterClub’s *Transition Toolkit*, available at http://www.fosterclub.com/files/transition_toolkit_v3.pdf
- ⁶⁹ Walters, D., Zanghi, M., Ansell, D., Armstrong, E., & Sutter, K. (2010), *Transition Planning with Adolescents: A Review of Principles and Practices Across Systems*, available at <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/transition-planning-with-adolescents.pdf>
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- ⁷¹ *Id.*
- ⁷² Indiana Department of child Services, *Independent Living Transition Planning Toolkit*, available at http://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Independent_living_transition_planning_toolkit.pdf
- ⁷³ Oregon Department of Human Services, *Comprehensive Transition Plan, User’s Guide*, available at http://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/safety_model/procedure_manual/appendices/ch4-app/4-18.pdf
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¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ *Id.*

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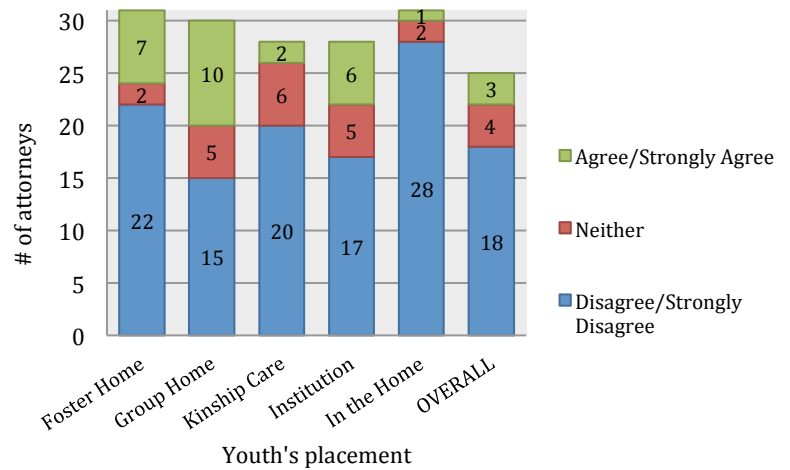


LRC SURVEY RESULTS: IMPLEMENTATION OF LB 177

31 Nebraska attorneys participated in this survey: 59% (18) practiced primarily in the Eastern Service Area, 23% (7) practiced in the Southeast Service Area, and 23% (7) practiced primarily in the Central, Northern, or Western Service Areas.

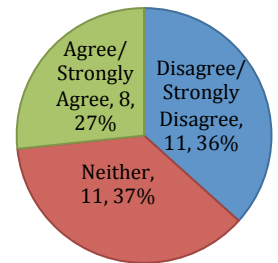
Question 1: “Over the past year, youth I have represented in the following placements generally have a written independent living transition proposal:”

Sixteen attorneys provided written comments for this question. Seven stated that they had never seen a written independent living transition proposal; one indicated having seen “very few.” Two more commented that conversations regarding independent living usually happen, but nothing much is done beyond that. One attorney stated, “Unless the court specifically orders a written plan, it does not occur, and courts do not order this.” Two others agreed that transition planning occurred only if someone else (e.g. judge, GAL) makes it happen. According to another, “I have encountered a lack of knowledge and understanding as to what the next step is... No one seems to be familiar with ANY adult services for children who most likely will age out.”



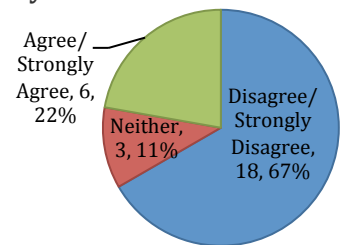
Question 2: “Generally, youth I have represented are actively involved in the development of their transition proposal.”

Six of the 30 attorneys who responded to this question provided written comments, although several again stated they had never seen a transition proposal. One commented, “If they are, it’s because of advocacy, not because of practice.” Another mentioned having witnessed situations where options were not clearly or fully explained to youth, which resulted in confusion and resistance. In the words of one attorney, “In my opinion, case managers should have a whole packet of information about all aspects of the transition plan and then go over it piece by piece with the youth to develop a complete plan that the youth can understand and sign off on... I can’t think of a case that I have where I have seen this type of planning and explanation.”



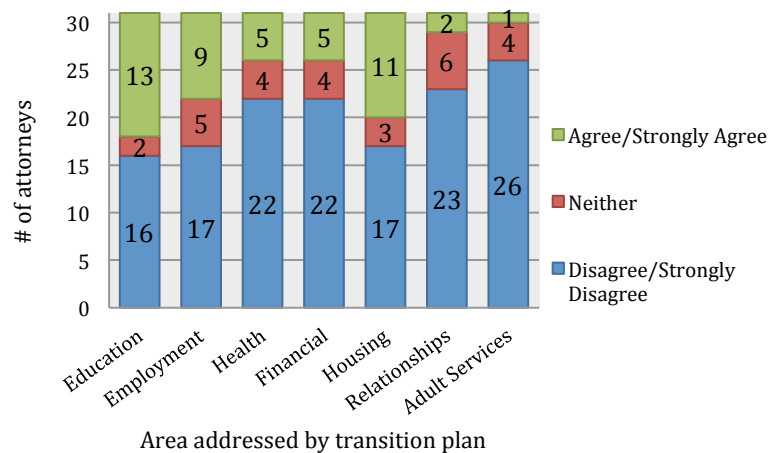
Question 3: “Overall, I am generally included as a member of the transition teams of youth I have represented.”

Of the 27 attorneys who responded to this question, 10 also offered written comments. Two stated that they had never been consulted or asked to provide input in the planning process. One reported rarely being invited to participate. Five attorneys credited their involvement not to the caseworker, but to of their own efforts. In the words of one, “There is rarely a plan – however, I am a pushy, involved attorney, so I am frequently involved in most meetings for my clients.”



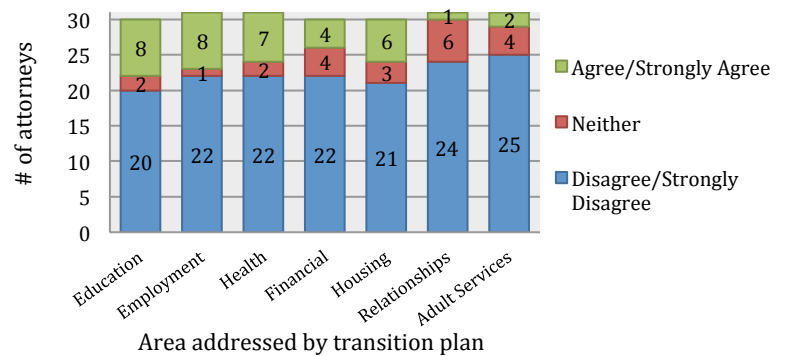
Question 4: “In general, the transition proposals of youth I have represented address the following areas effectively and comprehensively:”

A total of 31 attorneys responded to this question, and 6 provided additional comments. Much like the previous question, two cited their own advocacy efforts as the primary reason for success. One indicated, “The youth that I have represented never receive the above and foregoing without myself or the GAL hounding the worker to provide the information.” Another stated, “Independent living skills are neglected. ‘Work on the packet’ is the usual advise given. [There] really needs to be adult mentoring.” The other two referenced answers given to previous questions.



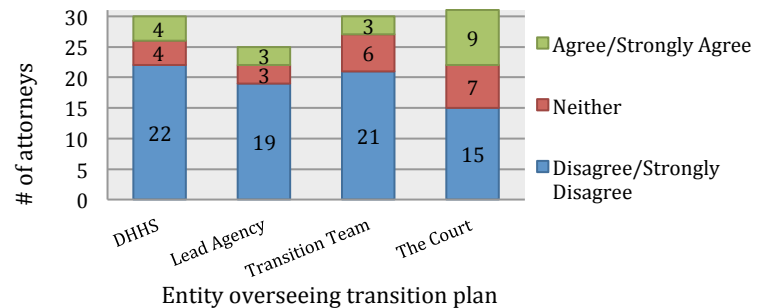
Question 5: “In general, youth I have represented are adequately prepared by DHHS (or lead agency, where applicable) for future success in the following areas:”

Only four attorneys commented on this question. One stated that level of preparation typically dependent upon the worker – some were very good at preparing youth, and some were not. Another said, “The youth that I have represented are not prepared once they age out. When the youth near 19, they are usually unable to get in touch with their worker and all services seem to abruptly halt.” The other two referenced answers given to previous questions.



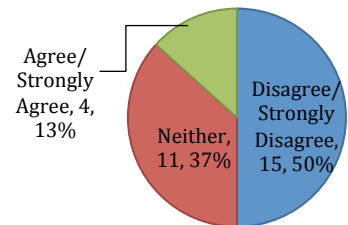
Question 6: “Transition proposals of youth I have represented are frequently reviewed and kept up-to-date by:”

Five attorneys provided written comments to this question. One indicated that PALS workers did most of the everyday maintenance. Others again indicated they had never seen a transition proposal, and, even when transition planning was discussed, there was no follow-through. One attorney stated, “By the time they get that close [to aging out], there’s not time to change/fix it, and professionals just write them off because they’re ‘aging out soon.’” Another simply asked, “What transition team????”



Question 7: “In general, youth I have represented are provided with their birth certificate and Social Security card (when eligible) at no cost to the youth prior to reaching the age of majority.”

Of 30 respondents, 9 offered written comments. One stated, “I can barely get the lead agencies to find birth certificates for kids young and still in their care – nothing is done for those aging out.” Another indicated that this was not done voluntarily and was a struggle to make happen. Yet another stated that one client was told by NFC that she would need to pay for these items herself or they would not provide them to her. One attorney had never heard of this service. Others suggested that youth need more guidance.



Question 8: What housing issues/challenges, if any, have youth you represented experienced in aging out?

Sixteen attorneys answered this question. Responses included a general lack of options, long waiting lists, limited access to housing subsidies, and starting the planning process too late in the case. According to one, “Youth are largely expected to figure it out.” Others expressed concerns about youths’ overall lack of credit history, references, co-signers, work history, appropriate roommates, and support systems. One attorney stated, “I haven’t had a youth age out with a solid plan as far as housing is concerned... none have had housing set up.” In contrast, another reported, “Housing is the one thing that I think HHS does cover fairly well.” Two commented on the lack of housing options for youth with developmental disabilities, and two others indicated that most youth ended up staying with friends or family.

Question 9: Additional comments (e.g. What areas of transition planning are most concerning?):

Eighteen attorneys answered this question. Transition planning in general was most frequently discussed, with a total of ten attorneys expressing concerns about the planning process, or lack thereof. “The thing I find most concerning about transition planning is how poorly equipped most youth are... and how poorly prepared we are for addressing this issue.” One referred to transition planning as “ignored at worst and not valued at least.” In the words of another, “Transition planning does not seem to honestly be on the radar. It seems more a means to an end of terminating jurisdiction sooner rather than later.” One attorney asked the judge to specifically order a transition plan in a case when one was not being done, “...but the Court states that it is statutorily required, so not necessary to put in a court order.”

Others discussed youths’ need for mentors or parental figures, agencies not wanting to “waste resources” on youth who were “just aging out,” the planning process beginning too late in the case, jurisdiction being terminated before youth turned 19, the lack of caseworkers’ communication with other case professionals about the plan (telling them what it is versus asking for input), and the arduous and time-consuming process of obtaining approval for services from the lead agency. Another identified the overall lack of options for youth with developmental disabilities as a significant issue. Of LB 177, one attorney said, “I am hoping that this legislative change will help address the shameful way Nebraska allows state wards to age out...”

YOUTH INVENTORY

To be completed with the youth as part of the transition planning process

Date inventory completed (month, day, year)	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial <input type="checkbox"/> 6-month update <input type="checkbox"/> 90 day final plan
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Youth Information

First name and middle initial	Last name	Case number	
Projected date youth will leave care (month, day, year)	Date of birth (month, day, year)	Current age	Gender

Personal Documents

- Original social security card
- Original or certified copy of birth certificate
- Driver's license or state identification card
- Immigration/citizenship documents, green card, and/or school visa (if youth is not a U.S. citizen)
- School records (including high school diploma/GED diploma and an updated copy of the youth's Individual Education Plan, if applicable)
- Resume (including both work and volunteer experience and contact information of at least three references)
- Health insurance/Medicaid card
- Medical records (including dental and vision records, immunization records, diagnosis confirmation, a list of current medications, etc.)
- Mental health records (including past mental health evaluations)
- Copy of credit report check
- Documentation of Social Security or other benefits, if applicable
- Certified copy of death certificate(s) of deceased parent(s), if applicable
- List of supportive adults to contact in crisis situations
- Contact information of all known relatives (with permission)
- Contact information of siblings (particularly if siblings are still in foster care)
- Life Book or a compilation of personal history and photographs
- If male, registered for the Selective Service
- Voter registration form or card
- Copy of final court order and/or a letter on DHHS letterhead indicating the youth was a state ward and date of discharge
- Information on how to access or obtain a copy of the youth's foster care case file
- Information on how to access or obtain a copy of the youth's court file
- Copy of completed Case Life Skills assessment
- Copy of written independent living transition proposal and Transition Proposal Checklist
- Signed copy of Youth Inventory
- Copy of signed voluntary services and support agreement or information on how to access the extended services program before age 21
- Personal filing system (lock box, file folder, or other way to organize and save these documents)

If eligible for public assistance:

- Copy of completed DHHS "Application for Benefits" form or ACCESSNebraska confirmation number (be sure to apply for all relevant programs: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance [SNAP], Aid to Dependent Children [ADC], etc.)
- Copy of completed application for the Public Housing and/or Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) programs
- Copy of completed application for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program (if applicable)
- Copies of other applications for public assistance: _____

If college bound:

- Copy of completed Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program application
- Copy of completed Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application
- Copy of completed Former Ward application and/or voluntary services and support agreement
- Copies of other financial aid applications: _____

Signatures of Transition Team Members

Signature of youth	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature of DHHS/NFC caseworker	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature of guardian ad litem	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature and role	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature and role	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature and role	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)

TRANSITION PROPOSAL CHECKLIST

To be completed with the youth as part of the transition planning process

* NOTE: This checklist is meant to accompany – not replace – the written transition proposal

Date checklist completed (month, day, year)	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial
	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-month update
	<input type="checkbox"/> 90 day final plan

Youth Information

First name and middle initial	Last name	Case number	
Projected date youth will leave care (month, day, year)	Date of birth (month, day, year)	Current age	Gender
Case Life Skills assessment completed: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Date assessment completed OR projected date assessment will be completed (month, day, year)		

Transition Teams should assist youth with the following needs (including the completion of necessary applications) prior to case closure:

Education

If workforce bound:

- School/educational records/transcripts
- Updated copy of the youth's Individual Education Plan (if applicable)
- High school or GED diploma
- Aptitude/vocational interest assessments to help determine career path of interest
- Certificates of competency/training certificates
- Applications to vocational/trade school
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

If college bound:

- School/educational records
- Updated copy of youth's Individual Education Plan (if applicable) to be provided to the college/university
- High school or GED diploma
- Aptitude/vocational interest assessments to help determine career path of interest
- ACT/SAT prep and testing times and places
- College visits
- College applications
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application: www.fafsa.gov
- Education and Training Voucher program application: www.central-plains.org/forms/prog_educ_trn_forms.pdf
- Former Ward program application and/or voluntary services and support agreement
- Applications for other available grants, scholarships, and tuition waiver programs
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Employment

- Resume (including both work and volunteer experience and contact information of at least three references)
- Sample job application
- Professional interview outfit
- Mock job interview
- Job or career fair
- Information about job placement agencies (e.g. Job Corps, AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, Conservation Corps)
- Job shadowing opportunities, mentorships, internships, employment training programs, etc.
- Juvenile record expunged/sealed
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Health and Health Care Coverage

- Information about the Affordable Care Act and the category providing youth who age out of foster care with coverage until 26, including contact information and details about how to access this coverage
- Comprehensive physical, dental, vision, and hearing screenings before leaving care
- Updated health records, including:
 - ✓ Medical records
 - ✓ Dental records
 - ✓ Vision records
 - ✓ Mental health records/past evaluations
 - ✓ Immunization records
 - ✓ Diagnosis confirmation
 - ✓ List of current medication/prescriptions
 - ✓ Any other documents related to medical history
- Adequate supply of all prescribed medications, including instructions on how to access refills
- Health insurance/Medicaid card
- Application for Medicaid or other type of health, dental, and vision insurance
- Authorization to remain with the same medical professionals OR a plan to switch care providers
- Contact information (names, telephone numbers, and addresses) of medical, dental, and mental health providers
- Resource list (with contact information) of various local free and/or sliding scale health clinics and medication assistance programs
- Information about services to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (e.g. Planned Parenthood)
- If needed, a plan for a designated adult to make health care or other decisions on behalf of the youth (may require court involvement)
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Financial Assistance

- Checking account
- Savings account
- Education about the risks of credit cards and the difference between credit and debit cards
- Stable source of income (job, public assistance, etc.)
- Money management/budgeting skills
- Monthly budget (including a long-term savings plan)
- Credit report check
- Education about the risks of identity theft
- Education on writing checks and balancing checkbooks
- Education on reading a paycheck stub
- Education on taxes (e.g. [irs.gov/app/understandingTaxes/student](https://www.irs.gov/app/understandingTaxes/student))
- Information about resources for free tax and Earned Income Tax (EITC) preparation
- Resource list (with contact information) of other available services (e.g. Opportunity Passport in Omaha, ACCESSNebraska, Aid to Dependent Children [ADC] program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, etc.)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Housing

- Housing plan (specific housing options, housing budget, furnishings needed, etc.)
- Back-up housing plan (other than staying at a homeless shelter)
- Housekeeping skills: cleaning, minor household repairs, grocery shopping, etc.
- References and/or co-signer
- Sample lease and rental application
- Public Housing and/or Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) application
- Resource list (with contact information) of services to assist with housing supplies/furnishings or rent/housing (e.g. Public housing, Section 8 vouchers, subsidized housing, Family Unification Program vouchers [if available], Transitional Living Programs under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act)
- Education on rights as a tenant
- Education on local homeless shelters (how to access services, contact information, visit/tour, etc.)
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Relationship Development

Lifelong connections to caring adults:

- Permanency plan (continued exploration of the possibility of adoption, guardianship, and/or reunification)
- Connections to birth family members with whom youth can maintain a safe and appropriate relationship (including siblings)
- Contact information (names, telephone numbers, and addresses) of siblings (particularly if siblings are still in foster care)
- Contact information (names, telephone numbers, addresses, and relations) of all known relatives (with permission)
- Contact information of agencies offering Family Finding services
- Connections to other significant adults committed to providing ongoing support
- Completed Permanency Pacts with as many supportive adults as possible: www.fosterclub.com/files/PermPact.pdf
- Contact information (names, telephone numbers, and addresses) of supportive adults to turn to in crisis situations (e.g. youth is lost, scared, depressed, anxious, sick, injured, out of food and money, utilities disconnected, heat goes out, etc.)
- Updated Life Book
- Compilation of personal history and photographs
- _____
- _____
- _____

Connections to the community:

- Resource list (with contact information) of local support groups, mentoring programs, or other supportive services (e.g. Project Everlast)
- General community resource list (with contact information) of local services (e.g. health clinics, employment agencies, public assistance services, housing agencies, homeless shelters, etc.)
- Connections to peer-to-peer websites, such as:
 - ✓ www.teenvoices.com– For teen and young adult women.
 - ✓ www.fosterclub.com– A national network for young people with foster care experience.
 - ✓ www.fosteryouthaction.org– The national foster youth action network.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Adult Services

- DHHS “Application for Benefits” form or ACCESSNebraska application: dhs-access-neb-apply.ne.gov/AccessNebraskaApplication/
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application (if not already included in ACCESSNebraska application)
- Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) application (if youth is a parent and if not already included in ACCESSNebraska application)
- Medicaid application (if not already included in ACCESSNebraska application)
- Public Housing and/or Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) application
- Education on and applications for other forms of public assistance (Emergency Cash Assistance Program, Low Income Energy Assistance Program, Employment First, etc.)
- _____
- _____
- _____

If youth has special needs:

- Consult with Adult Services about eligibility upon leaving care (including Group Residential Housing)
- Screen for disabilities to determine Supplemental Security Income (SSI) eligibility – ideally at age 16/17
- SSI application
- Assistance to the Aged, Blind, or Disabled (AABD) application
- Disability insurance application
- _____
- _____
- _____

Other

Transportation:

- Education on AND experience driving and maintaining a car
- Education on AND experience using public transportation
- Bus cards
- Driver’s license
- Driver Education classes
- Car insurance (if applicable)
- _____
- _____
- _____

Life skills:

- Connections to independent living services (e.g. Branching Out, PALS, Project Everlast, etc.) and classes that will assist after leaving care
- Connections to free online resources, such as:
 - ✓ www.casey.org/youth/resources.htm – Offers various online resources youth can download, including *I Know Where I’m Going (But Will My Cash Keep Up?)*, a workbook focused on money management, and *I’m Getting Ready. I CAN DO IT!*, an interactive workbook addressing many topics, including legal issues, safety, searching for an apartment, nutrition, home and money management, and goal setting.
 - ✓ www.onyourway.org– Youth can create a profile and learn about various topics that will help youth create a life plan, access education, and achieve employment.
 - ✓ www.transition.fosterclub.com– Connects youth to various resources, including the Permanency Pact, 21 things youth should not leave foster care without, information on how to access higher education, and other publications designed to assist youth become independent.
 - ✓ www.youthhood.org– Offers information for youth about education, positive choices, youths’ rights, health, independence, and self-advocacy.
- _____
- _____
- _____

The Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act:

- If potentially eligible, information about the extended services program, including details about eligibility and other requirements, the services and support young adults can receive, how to access the program (including contact information), and how to prevent a lapse in services and support
- If eligible for extended adoption/guardianship subsidies, information about how to access services (including contact information)
- If eligible for the state extended guardianship assistance program, information on how to access services (including contact information)
- _____
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Signatures of Transition Team Members

Signature of youth	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature of DHHS/NFC caseworker	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature of guardian ad litem	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature and role	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature and role	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)
Signature and role	Email	Phone number	Date (month, day, year)