

# ★ THE BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ACT ★

*Providing services and support to age 21 for young adults who were formerly in foster care*

The Bridge to Independence Act went into effect on October 1, 2014 and created three statewide programs in Nebraska that provide services and support for young adults between the ages of 19 and 21 who were formerly in foster care.

Here are a few things you should know:

## SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG ADULTS

### BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM (B2I)

Young adults who had an abuse or neglect case and were in an out-of-home placement at age 19, were discharged to independent living, or exited foster care to a guardianship at age 16 or older, can receive:

- ★ Medicaid coverage
- ★ A monthly stipend
- ★ Young adult-directed case management services

### EXTENDED ADOPTION PROGRAM

Young adults who entered into an adoption agreement at age 16 or older (and whose adoptive parents were receiving adoption assistance) can receive:

- ★ Medicaid coverage
- ★ Continued adoption payments

### EXTENDED GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM

Young adults who entered into a guardianship at 16 or older and choose not to be in the B2I program, may be eligible for the extended guardianship program. The extended guardianship program includes:

- ★ Medicaid coverage
- ★ Continued guardianship payments

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Young adults must be doing at least one of the following to be eligible for these programs:

- ★ Completing high school or an equivalent program (e.g. GED)
- ★ Enrolled at least part-time in college, community college, or a vocational education program
- ★ Employed at least 80 hours per month (about 20 hours a week)
- ★ Participating in a program or activity to remove barriers to employment (e.g. an internship, volunteering, working with a local career center)
- ★ Unable to do any of those things because of a medical condition

To be part of the B2I program, there are a few other responsibilities of young adults:

- ★ Sign up for the program. *Young adults must sign an agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to participate in the program.*
- ★ Meet regularly with an Independence Coordinator. *Independence Coordinators will help young adults identify and meet their individual goals.*
- ★ Attend court hearings at least once a year and case reviews twice a year.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- ★ **It is up to the young adult.** The program is voluntary, so young adults decide if they want to participate or not.
- ★ **It is young adult-directed.** Services are designed to help young adults meet their individual goals.
- ★ **Young adults can change their minds.** If young adults decide to leave the program, they can still come back in later. If young adults decide not to sign up right away, they can sign up any time before they turn 21.

# FAQs:

## How do I sign up?

You can access the application on the DHHS website at [www.dhhs.ne.gov/b2i](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/b2i). You must then sign an agreement with DHHS to receive services. For details about this, contact your caseworker, your guardian ad litem, your local DHHS office, or Nebraska Appleseed's Intake Line at 1-800-845-3746.

## What if I sign up and then change my mind?

Young adults can exit the program at any time. And if something is not going right, there are things you can do to make the program work better for you.

## What if I don't sign up before I leave foster care?

You don't have to sign up right away. Eligible young adults can sign up any time before they turn 21.

## I was put in a foster home or group home through the juvenile justice system. Am I eligible?

In order to be eligible for the program, young adults have to have had an abuse or neglect case. If you were dually adjudicated (in other words, if you had both an abuse or neglect case and a juvenile justice case), you would be eligible for the program as long as you meet other eligibility requirements. Check with your caseworker, your GAL, or someone else at DHHS if you're not sure about your case.

## I was guardianshiped on or after my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, which program can I join?

If you meet the other eligibility requirements, you can choose to join the B2I program or the extended guardianship program. If you choose the B2I program, you receive Medicaid coverage, a monthly stipend, young adult-directed case management services, and you will have at least one court hearing and two case reviews per year. If you choose to enter the extended guardianship program, you receive Medicaid coverage and continued guardianship payments.

## My foster care case was in a tribal court. Am I eligible?

Yes, if you meet the other eligibility criteria, you can participate.

## My case was closed to independent living before I turned 19. Can I still sign up for the B2I program?

You have to be between 19 and 21 to participate in the program, but it doesn't matter how old you were when your case was closed to independent living.

## What housing options do I have in the B2I program?

Young adults will work with their Independence Coordinator to decide which housing option is right for them. Housing options for this program include:

- ★ Foster family homes (either relative or non-relative)
- ★ Supervised independent living settings (e.g. renting an apartment or house either alone or with a roommate, college dorm, living with relatives or friends, etc)
- ★ If necessary due to developmental level or a medical condition, an institution or group home. Young adults who are in a group home when they age out can also choose to stay there temporarily, until they can transition to a more independent setting.
- ★ Young adults who entered a guardianship agreement at age 16 or older and choose the B2I program can continue living with their former guardian or seek other options.

## How does the B2I monthly stipend work?

In the B2I program, young adults can receive a monthly stipend of \$760. If a young adult is living in a foster home or group home, the stipend may continue to be provided to the foster family or group home. If a young adult is living in a supervised independent living setting (see question above for details), all or part of the stipend may come directly to the young adult. Decisions about how to handle the stipend in those cases are made on an individual basis.

## How often do I need to meet with the Independence Coordinator or other people in my B2I case?

Monthly face-to-face meetings with your Independence Coordinator are required in the B2I program, although extra contact may be needed. Young people in the program also attend two case reviews (involving someone from the Foster Care Review Office, your Independence Coordinator, and other people you think should be there) and at least one court hearing (involving your Independence Coordinator, a judge, your attorney if you want one, and other people you think should be there) each year. Aside from that, contact with your Independence Coordinator depends on your own individual needs.

*If you have questions contact Nebraska Appleseed at 1-800-845-3746*