

Bridge to INDEPENDENCE

LB 216

Young people aging out of foster care face a number of negative outcomes in adulthood. Only 2% finish college, and 50% experience homelessness. Extending voluntary services and support to those who age out of foster care can help increase the percentage of those who earn a college degree, cut their rates of homelessness, and lessen the risk of incarceration.

Program Description

LB 216, now called the **Bridge to Independence** program, was passed by the Nebraska Legislature in June of 2013. It extends services and support to age 21 for young people aging out of foster care. **The purpose of this program is to provide voluntary, young adult-driven services to improve the outcomes of young people in Nebraska.** This program is a state option under the Federal Fostering Connections Act and will allow Nebraska to draw down federal funding.

Extended Guardianship and Adoption Assistance

Two additional programs under LB 216 extend assistance for young adults who entered into a guardianship or were adopted after age 16.

Young people who entered into a guardianship with a licensed relative at age 16 or older, had a guardianship agreement, and are meeting one of the education or work requirements outlined at right will be eligible to receive Medicaid coverage and extended guardianship subsidies until age 21. If the guardianship was not with a licensed relative, young adults will be eligible to receive extended guardianship subsidies through a state extended guardianship program to the extent possible with existing funds.

Young people who were adopted at age 16 or older will receive Medicaid coverage and extended adoption subsidies.



Extended Services & Support

Participation Requirements

- Adjudication under §43-247(3)(a) and in an out-of-home placement at age 19 or discharged to independent living. This includes young adults who were dually adjudicated.
- Young adults must be doing at least one of the following activities (1) completing secondary education, (2) enrolled in post-secondary education, (3) employed at least 80 hours per month, (4) participating in a program or activity to remove barriers to employment, or (5) unable to do any of these because of a medical condition.

Services for Young Adults

- Medicaid coverage
- Continued foster care maintenance payments for housing support
- Age-appropriate, young adult-driven case management services
- Case reviews and permanency hearings to evaluate progress toward meeting goals.

Steps to Obtaining Services

- Young adults who wish to receive services will sign a voluntary services and support agreement with the department.
- Eligible **young adults can opt in and/or out** of the program any time after turning 19 and before turning 21.
- The department must provide information yearly to potentially eligible youth beginning at age 16 and 90 days prior to the youth's final court review.

COURT'S ROLE

Important Timelines for the Court

The Court has jurisdiction to review the voluntary services and support agreement signed by the young adult. **Within 180 days** of the signing of the agreement, the court shall open an extended services and support file for the young adult to determine whether the program is in the young adult's best interests and to conduct permanency hearings.

Permanency Review

The court shall conduct a permanency review hearing once a year (or at the young adult's request) to ensure that the young adult is getting the needed services and support to move toward permanency and self-sufficiency.

The court shall consult with the young adult in an age-appropriate manner and support the active engagement of the young adult in key decisions. The court shall determine whether the department is providing the appropriate services and support and may order the department to take action if the necessary services and support are not being provided.



Court Appointed Attorney

The court may appoint an attorney for the young adult if the young adult desires. **The attorney's representation of the young adult shall be client-directed.** The attorney shall protect the young adult's legal rights and advocate for his or her wishes and goals. A previously-appointed GAL may continue in a client-directed model of representation with the consent of the young adult. The court may also appoint a Court Appointed Special Advocate or continue the appointment of a previously-appointed CASA volunteer with the consent of the young adult.

The department shall notify the young adult of the right to an attorney before entering into an agreement and at least 60 days before each permanency and case review. The case reviewer shall also notify the young adult following each case review.

Youth adjudicated under §43-247(3)(a) and in an out-of-home placement turns 16 (or enters care after turning 16)

Department begins providing written information about the program and does so every year thereafter.

90 days prior to the youth's last court

The department provides written information about the program, and a representative meets with the youth to explain the program.

Within 45 days of signing the agreement

An Independence Coordinator is assigned and the young adult begins receiving program services. The department files a petition with the juvenile court.

Within 180 days of signing the agreement

The court opens an extended services and support file to determine whether participating in the program is in the young adult's best interest and to conduct the permanency reviews.

Every 180 days

The Foster Care Review Office conducts a case review.

Annually (or by request)

The court conducts a permanency review.