



**Nebraska Children's Commission**  
1225 L Street, Suite 401  
Lincoln, NE 68508

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June 25, 2019

Patrick O'Donnell, Clerk of the Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 2018  
PO Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dear Mr. O'Donnell,

Neb. Rev. Stat. [§43-4513\(1\)](#) requires the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission) to provide a report to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and the Governor by September 1<sup>st</sup> annually regarding ongoing implementation, including participation in the B2i program, extended guardianship assistance and extended adoption assistance, and early discharge rates from the B2i program.

The B2i Advisory Committee is also required to create specific recommendations for expanding the program to additional populations and improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. [§43-4513\(1\)](#).

This report contains the above information, in addition to recommendations which are intended to provide thoughtful guidance for the continued effective implementation of the B2i program. The Commission reviewed and approved this report at their June 18, 2019 meeting.

Respectfully,

Jeanne K. Brandner,  
Co-Chair, B2i Advisory Committee  
Vice Chair, Nebraska Children's Commission

Christina Lloyd  
Co-Chair, B2i Advisory Committee

Enclosure:  
B2i Advisory Committee 2018 Report (Final-Legislature)

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6/18/2019



# Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee 2018-2019 Annual Report

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

Submitted Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513  
*For more information about the Bridge to Independence  
program and Advisory Committee, please visit the  
Children's Commission website at  
[www.childrens.nebraska.gov](http://www.childrens.nebraska.gov).*

# BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

## BACKGROUND

The Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee was created pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513](#) to make recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Commission regarding the B2i program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance. This Advisory Committee is Co-Chaired by Jeanne Brandner (Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation) and Christina Lloyd (CEDARS Youth Services). The DHHS Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), service providers, youth advocates, system stakeholders, and current and former foster youth provide regular feedback and updates. The Advisory Committee serves as a forum for stakeholders to exchange information, provide support, and create innovative solutions to the challenges facing child welfare youth aging out of foster care.

## STATUTORY CHARGE

Make recommendations regarding the Bridge to Independence Program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance [[Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513\(1\)](#)]

## PRIORITIES

1. Monitor ongoing implementation of the current B2i Program;
2. Outcome evaluation of the current B2i Program;
3. Expand to or improve outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults

## BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM BACKGROUND

B2i is a voluntary program that provides supports for young adults between the ages of 17 to 21, as they transition from foster care to adulthood. Young adults who join B2i, have access to: a B2i case worker, called an Independence Coordinator, advice and resources to help them meet their goals, health care coverage if Medicaid eligible under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and a monthly extended foster care stipend. For young adults who achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship after age 16, extended assistance stipends may also be available. The program began in October of 2014, and is now in its fifth year.

To remain in the program, youth must be working towards a productive adulthood in one of these ways: completing a high school diploma or attaining a GED, taking classes at least part time at a college or vocational education program, working at least 80 hours a month, engaging in an activity designed to allow the young adult to address barriers to workforce participation, or be medically incapable of the above activities. Young adults must also meet with their Independence Coordinator on a monthly basis, and be permanent residents of the State of Nebraska, unless placed out of state through an Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2018 and 2019, the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee continued to work on the B2i external evaluation. With the help of system partners, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the DHHS, and the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO), the Data and Evaluation Workgroup is working with Child Trends, a nationally renowned non-profit research center, to evaluate the B2i program. The evaluation will guide the program's definition of success for young adult participants, as well as establish an ongoing mechanism to perform an internal evaluation of program effectiveness. As part of the statutory charge, the Data and Evaluation Workgroup provides updates at B2i Advisory Committee meetings and looks forward to the culmination of this important evaluation in 2019.

During the 106<sup>th</sup> legislature, 1st session, Senator Kate Bolz put forth several recommendations from the B2i Advisory Committee's [2018 Annual Report](#) as part of [LB600](#). Many partners came forward to support the bill's components. The bill extends the operations of the Nebraska Children's Commission, and its support for the B2i Advisory Committee.

More specifically, this legislation:

- Requires the Court to hold an Independence Hearing for youth adjudicated under §43-247 (8) prior to terminating jurisdiction.
- Expands eligibility to youth adjudicated under §43-247 (8) who have experienced a disrupted guardianship or state-funded adoption assistance agreement at age 16 or older;
- Requires as a component of eligibility, Nebraska residency, except a Nebraska resident placed outside of Nebraska pursuant to an Interstate Compact Placement of Children agreement;
- Maintains eligibility for children who do not meet nursing facility level of care, skilled nursing facility, or intermediate care facility for persons with developmental disabilities (NRS §71-424; NRS §71-429; §71-421);
- Requires the Court to make reasonable efforts findings and issue those findings in writing within 12 months after the court makes its "best interests" determination, and
- Requires the Court to determine whether reasonable efforts have been made to achieve the permanency goal outlined in the case plan and the department's report provided under subdivision (6)(b) of §43-4508, and issue specific written findings regarding such reasonable efforts;
- Allows young adults who are eligible to participate under both extended adoption assistance (NRS §43-4512) and the B2i program in subdivision (2)(b) of section §43-4504 a choice to participate in either version of the B2i program;
- Requires DHHS to provide written notice to young adults who are eligible under extended adoption assistance and B2i;
- Directs the department to submit an amended state plan to seek Title IV-E funding by October 2019 for any newly eligible young adult (disrupted/terminated guardianship/state-funded adoption assistance agreement).

A necessary component to monitoring the ongoing implementation of B2i is reviewing data on a regular and ongoing basis. The B2i Advisory Committee, the DHHS, and Foster Care Review Office have prioritized continuous quality improvement and data analysis of the B2i program. At each Committee meeting, program and participant data is reviewed and discussed. It is used to guide the work of the Advisory Committee and formulate recommendations. The data includes essential indicators related to the participants, exits and entries, services and benefits accessed by participants, and federal Title IV-E funding for the program.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the next year, the Advisory Committee plans to revisit past recommendations since 2015 that have either not been adopted, or, were adopted but have since, required renewed attention.

Some past recommendations in need of attention have been included in this year's recommendations. The Advisory Committee continues to support the expansion of the Bridge to Independence program to similar or at-risk populations including youth exiting the juvenile justice system and Tribal youth.

The B2i Advisory Committee will continue to explore what is working within the current program and how best to expand using the data and analytics available. Committee meetings in 2018 and 2019 will explore issues related to the extended guardianship and adoption programs along with the areas identified in this report. These efforts will aid the Advisory Committee in monitoring the B2i program, supporting DHHS-DCFS, and providing information and recommendations to the Nebraska Children's Commission, Governor, and the Legislature.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A statutory language change is recommended to extend eligibility for the Bridge to Independence program to native youth aging out of Tribal Court proceedings at the age of majority as defined by the Tribe, to mend the one-year gap in supports between ages 18 and 19 due to the State age of majority, when Bridge to Independence begins.
2. Establish a path for enrollment in the current DHHS-facilitated Bridge to independence program for youth involved in Nebraska's Juvenile Justice System utilizing the following two criteria:
  - a. A young person must be in a court-ordered out of home placement as they age out of probation on their 19th birthday; and
  - b. Prior to aging out, the court must hold a hearing and make a finding that such placement is necessary because returning to the home would be contrary to the welfare of the child.
3. An Independence Coordinator must meet with youth prior to aging out a minimum of six months prior to their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.
4. Consistent with the Case Management, Supportive Services, and Housing Workgroup recommendations in the Committee's [2013 report](#), it is recommended DHHS ensure Independence Coordinators have a specialized B2i caseload no more than 15 young adults per Coordinator in rural areas and 20 per Coordinator in urban areas of the state. The Advisory Committee will re-examine caseload size following the external evaluation to reassess appropriate caseload sizes.
5. System partners will collaborate to explore how Bridge to Independence participants can access services available through the federal Family First Prevention and Services Act, including vulnerable populations such as pregnant and parenting young adults exiting child welfare.

# EXTERNAL EVALUATION

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE EVALUATION

1. Does participating in B2i enhance outcomes (education, employment, financial, housing, parenting, well-being) during the transition to adulthood, during the program, and after the program?
2. How does B2i case management and the stipend influence outcomes during the program and after graduating from the program?
3. What young adult personal or life characteristics influence success in B2i?
4. Does the length of time in foster care, number of placement changes, substance use, or mental health challenges impact success?
5. Do young adults who participate in B2i perceive they have gained knowledge, skills, and relationships for transition to adulthood?
6. Is the B2i program targeting the right population?
7. Does case management at younger ages (<19 years) prepare young adults for the B2i program?
8. How is the B2i program being implemented in different communities, and what are the successes and challenges to implementing each program component?

The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCF), the FCRO, and DHHS-CFS contracted with Child Trends for an external evaluation for the B2i Program. The B2i population participates in evaluations and data collection from several different entities. This independent evaluation is designed to ensure that the outcomes for this population are clearly identified and correctly determine which measure will demonstrate whether young adults are making progress towards these outcomes.

NCF and DCFS are seeking to answer several important questions related to the B2i program. The current evaluation has identified three components outlined below.

### 1. Outcome Analysis and Data Consultation

**Description:** This task includes linking existing data, including that from the Opportunity Passport Participant Survey, National Youth in Transition Database, the Connected Youth Initiative, and FCRO data to analyze outcomes for young adults participating in B2i. Results will be reported in the fall of 2019.

### 2. Youth Assessment of B2i Program and Other Supports and Services

**Description:** Child Trends researchers will assess how the B2i program is serving young people in Nebraska by conducting focus groups and phone interviews with young people in a rural and urban community. A mix of young people were invited to participate—both those who are currently participating in the B2i program (or other extended care activities) as well as those youth who are not participating in any extended care activities. The qualitative study will identify promising strategies and generate lessons for the broader child welfare field through input from young adults about their perceptions of the B2i program as well as other available services and supports (whether the programs and services provided them with new knowledge, skills, and relationships), and reasons for staying in care or leaving care.

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION

### 3. Develop Framework for Nebraska and Other States to Assess Extended Care.

**Description:** Develop a framework for Nebraska to conduct ongoing assessment of their extension of care program. In developing the framework, the research team will document the process paying close attention to how the framework and learnings in Nebraska can reach other states.

The Workgroup and Advisory Committee will continue to work on this evaluation and look forward to providing the Legislature and Governor with more information to guide the work of supporting improved outcomes for Nebraska's young adults. Good progress has been made towards accomplishing this goal and the Workgroup and Advisory Committee anticipate a completed evaluation in 2019.



# CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS

## CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS

Through the use of data made available by DHHS-DCFS and the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO), there is routine review of programs accessed and services provided through B2i. The B2i program is monitored and refined through the use of data analysis and case reviews. This data is shared and discussed at Advisory Committee meetings and is used to guide the work of the Advisory Committee and formulate recommendations. The data includes essential indicators related to the participants, exits and entries, services and benefits accessed by participants, and federal Title IV-E funding for the program.

## DHHS CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI) PROCESS

DHHS has created a CQI process to examine point in time and data over time collected through the B2i Program. This data is run on a monthly basis and reviewed by DHHS and stakeholders for program and process improvement ([see attachment A](#)). The Advisory Committee will continue to review this data and support DHHS in its CQI process.

The following information has been identified as key for the review of the Advisory Committee:

1. Title IV-E eligibility data;
2. Data related to the benefits and programs that young adults enrolled in the B2i program are accessing;
3. Program participation including entries, exits and reasons for exit; and
4. Total number of young adults served in each fiscal year since 2014.

## FOSTER CARE REVIEW OFFICE DATA COLLECTION

The Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) has a statutory duty to review B2i cases, and has identified a need to focus on data from which conclusions about the program may be drawn. The review process was modified last year to focus on broader outcome issues, including the progress the young adult has made on their goals, such as employment or education. The case file reviews now evaluate:

1. Young adult goals and the progress made on goals;
2. Independence Coordinator responsibilities; and
3. Young adult responsibilities.

Since implementing this in August 2018, the FCRO has completed 20-35 reviews per month. The Data Collection Workgroup and Advisory Committee will continue to provide comments and feedback on the new FCRO B2i case review process.

## EXPANDING TO SIMILAR AND AT-RISK POPULATIONS

The B2i Advisory Committee has been charged by statute to create recommendations to expand the program or improve outcomes for similar groups of at risk young adults. Two key populations have emerged through analysis and collaboration:

1. Youth exiting Juvenile Probation who remain in out of home placement at age 19, and
2. Youth exiting Tribal Court custody at age 18.

Each Annual report since 2015 has included recommendations to expand the program to at risk youth exiting the juvenile justice system after having been in juvenile justice out-of-home placements. Juvenile justice involved youth with clear and demonstrated needs for support to prevent adult involvement with the criminal justice system, homelessness, and increased need for support programs would benefit from the B2i program. The Advisory continues to support this recommendation.

Many states age of majority is 18, while in Nebraska, the age of majority is age 19. In addition to the many other states, Nebraska tribal territories recognize age of majority at 18. The B2i program enrolls young adults at age 19, the State of Nebraska's recognized age of majority. The one-year gap for native youth has made locating youth for enrollment particularly challenging and subjected them to a period with no formal support or resources.

A statutory language change recognizing the age of majority at either the state or tribal definition would ensure that the program could benefit all young adults aging out of care without permanency. It is recommended to extend eligibility for the Bridge to Independence program to native youth aging out of Tribal Court proceedings at the age of majority.

## Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Members

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
<b>Jeanne Brandner</b> (Co-Chair)	Ex-Officio	<b>Deputy Administrator of the Division of Juvenile Services</b> , Administrative Office of Probation	Judicial Branch Representative
<b>Christina Lloyd</b> (Co-Chair)	Voting	<b>Program Director -Bridges Transitional Living and Street Outreach Services</b> , CEDARS Youth Services	Child Welfare Service Agency Representative
<b>Whitney Beck</b>	Voting	<b>Young Adult Previously in Foster Care</b> , Young Adult Previously in Foster Care	Young Adult Currently or Previously in Foster Care
<b>Vernon Davis</b>	Voting	<b>Young Adult Previously in Foster Care</b> , Young Adult Previously in Foster Care	Young Adult Currently or Previously in Foster Care
<b>Mary Fraser Meints</b>	Voting	<b>Executive Director</b> , Youth Emergency Services	Independent Living Services Agency Representative
<b>Misty Frazier</b>	Voting	<b>Executive Director</b> , Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition	Federally Recognized Indian Tribe Residing within the State of Nebraska Representative
<b>Sarah Helvey</b>	Voting	<b>Program Director / Staff Attorney – Child Welfare Program</b> , Nebraska Appleseed	Child Welfare Advocacy Organization Representative
<b>Doug Lenz</b>	Voting	<b>Director</b> , Central Plains Center for Services	Independent Living Services Agency Representative
<b>Amanda McGill Johnson</b>	Voting	<b>Community Impact &amp; Strategic Initiatives Director</b> , Nebraska Children's Home Society	Child Welfare Service Agency Representative
<b>Bailey Perry</b>	Voting	<b>Transitional Living Manager</b> , Omaha Home for Boys, Jacob's Place	Independent Living Services Agency Representative
<b>Sara Riffel</b>	Voting	<b>Associate Vice President, Connected Youth Initiative</b> , Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	Child Welfare Service Agency Representative
<b>Camas Steuter</b>	Voting	<b>Service Area Administrator</b> , DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services	Executive Branch Representative
<b>Juliet Summers</b>	Voting	<b>Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice</b> , Voices for Children in Nebraska	Child Welfare Advocacy Organization Representative
<b>Susan Thomas</b>	Voting	<b>CASA Volunteer</b> , Nebraska CASA Association	Child Welfare Advocacy Organization Representative
<b>Lana Verbrigghe</b>	Voting	<b>Director of Child Welfare Services</b> , Child Saving Institute	Independent Living Services Agency Representative
<b>Cristen White</b>	Voting	<b>Operations Program Manager</b> , PromiseShip	Child Welfare Service Agency Representative
<b>Vacant</b>	Voting	,	Behavioral Health Organization Representative
<b>Brandy Gustoff</b>	Resource	<b>Innovative Growth Leader</b> , Omaha Home for Boys	Independent Living Services Agency Representative
<b>Candi Marcantel</b>	Resource	<b>Supervisor</b> , Sarpy County CASA	Child Welfare Advocacy Organization Representative
<b>Katie McLeese Stephenson</b>	Resource	<b>Director</b> , Child Guidance Center	Child Welfare Service Agency Representative
<b>Jennifer Skala</b>	Resource	<b>Senior Vice President of Community Impact</b> , Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	Independent Living Services Agency Representative
<b>Kim Thomas</b>	Resource	<b>Executive Director</b> , Douglas County Nebraska CASA	Child Welfare Advocacy Organization Representative
<b>Sen. Kate Bolz</b>	Ex-Officio	<b>Senator</b> , Nebraska Legislature - District 29	Legislative Branch Representative

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
<b>Deb VanDyke-Ries</b>	Ex-Officio	<b>Director</b> , Nebraska Court Improvement Project	Judicial Branch Representative
<b>Anna Wishart</b>	Ex-Officio	<b>Senator for Legislative District 27</b> , Nebraska Legislative Council	Legislative Branch Representative

# NEBRASKA CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI)



## Bridge to Independence

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- **Our Vision:** Partnering with families to safely care for children in their own homes and communities.

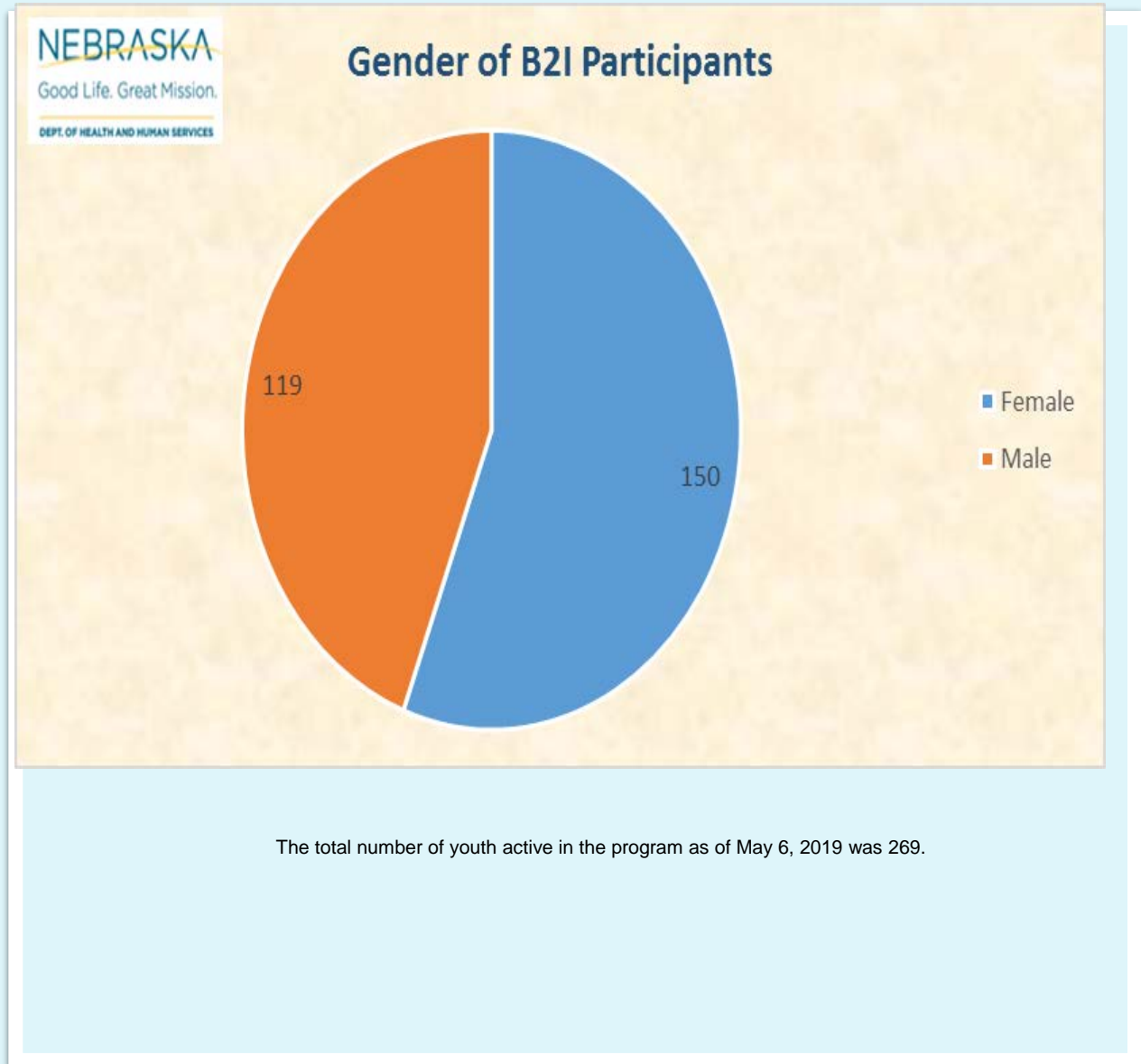
### Our Commitments:

1. Children are our #1 priority
2. We respect and value parents and families
3. We value partnerships
4. We are child welfare professionals



## History

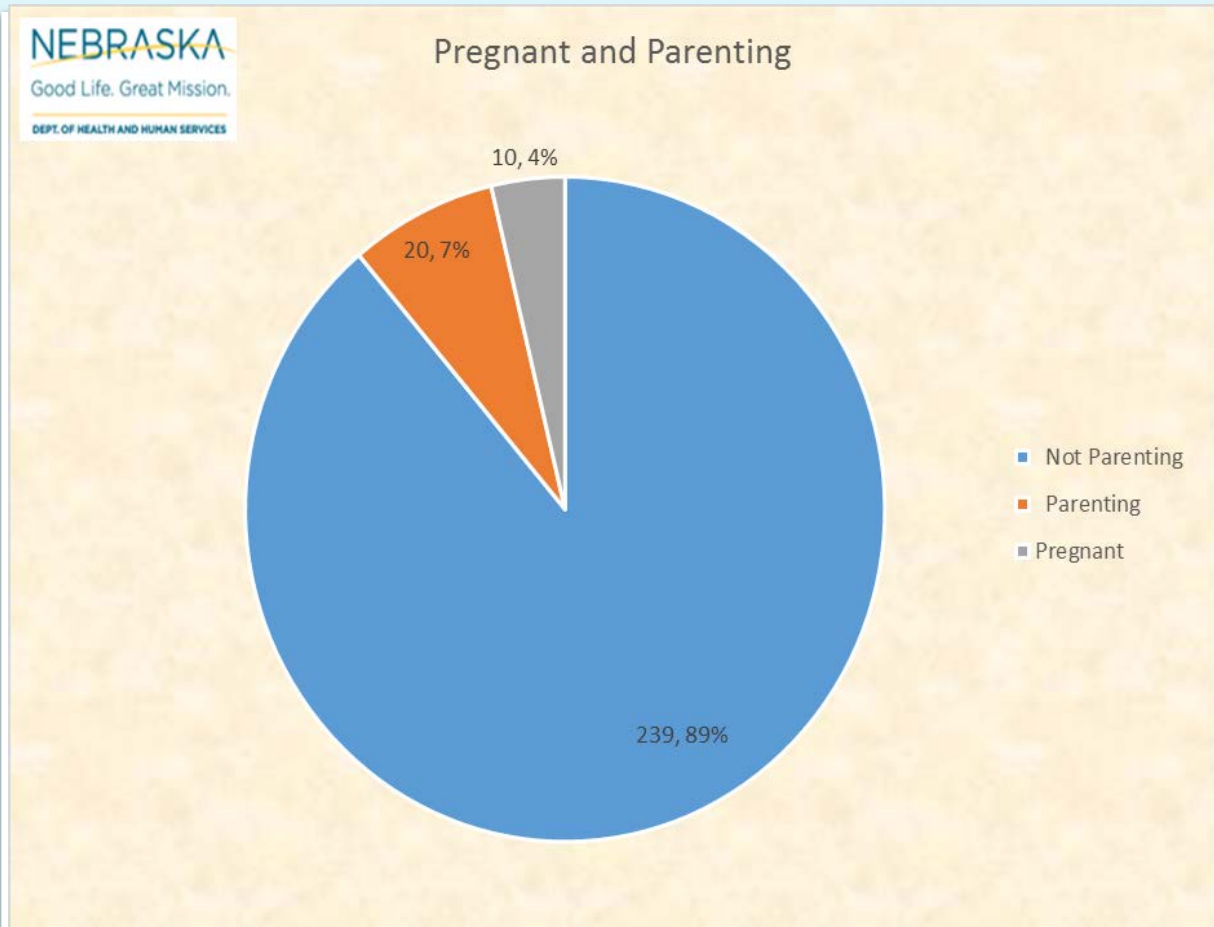
May 2019	269
April 2019	254
March 2019	251
February 2019	239
January 2019	243
December 2018	250
November 2018	252
October 2018	252
September 2018	259
August 2018	257
July 2018	263
June 2018	270
May 2018	267
April 2018	266
March 2018	277
February 2018	273
January 2018	303



# History

<b>May 2019</b>	<b>Parenting 7%</b> <b>Pregnant 4%</b>
<b>April 2019</b>	<b>Parenting 8%</b> <b>Pregnant 4%</b>
<b>March 2019</b>	<b>Parenting 8%</b> <b>Pregnant 5%</b>
<b>February 2019</b>	<b>Parenting 8%</b> <b>Pregnant 5%</b>
<b>January 2019</b>	<b>Parenting 9%</b> <b>Pregnant 4%</b>
<b>December 2018</b>	<b>Parenting 8%</b> <b>Pregnant 5%</b>
<b>November 2018</b>	<b>Parenting 8%</b> <b>Pregnant 7%</b>
<b>October 2018</b>	<b>Parenting 10%</b> <b>Pregnant 4%</b>

**From January 2018 to September 2018 data was discovered to be inaccurate.**



The total number of youth active in the program as of May 6, 2019 was 269.

# History

The # indicates the number of young adults who are parenting either 1 child or 2 children:

**May 2019**

1 child 15  
2 children 7  
Total 22

**April 2019**

1 child 15  
2 children 7  
Total 22

**March 2019**

1 child 15  
2 children 7  
Total 22

**February 2019**

1 child 13  
2 children 7  
Total 20

**January 2019**

1 child 17  
2 children 4  
Total 21

**December 2018**

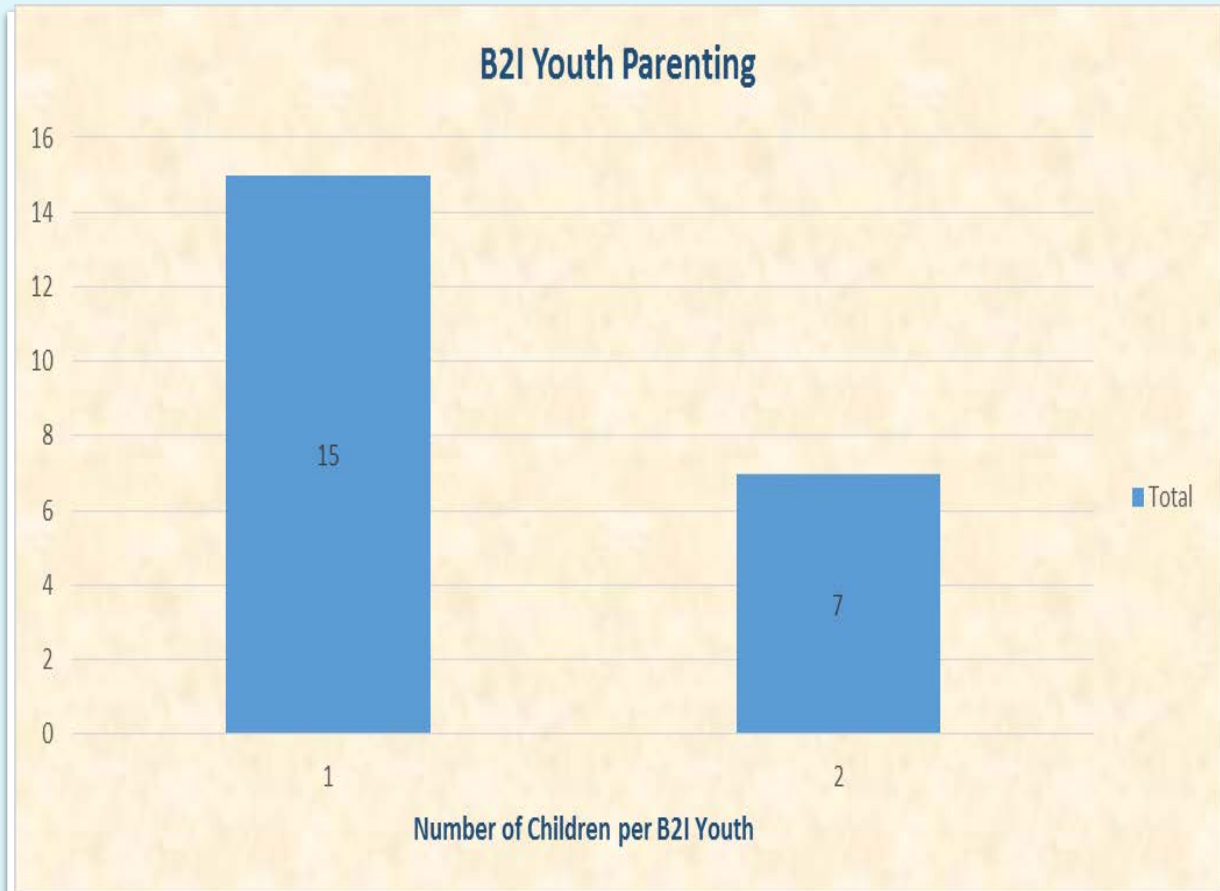
1 child 17  
2 children 4  
Total 21

**November 2018**

1 child 17  
2 children 4  
Total 21

**October 2018**

1 child 15  
2 children 8  
Total 23



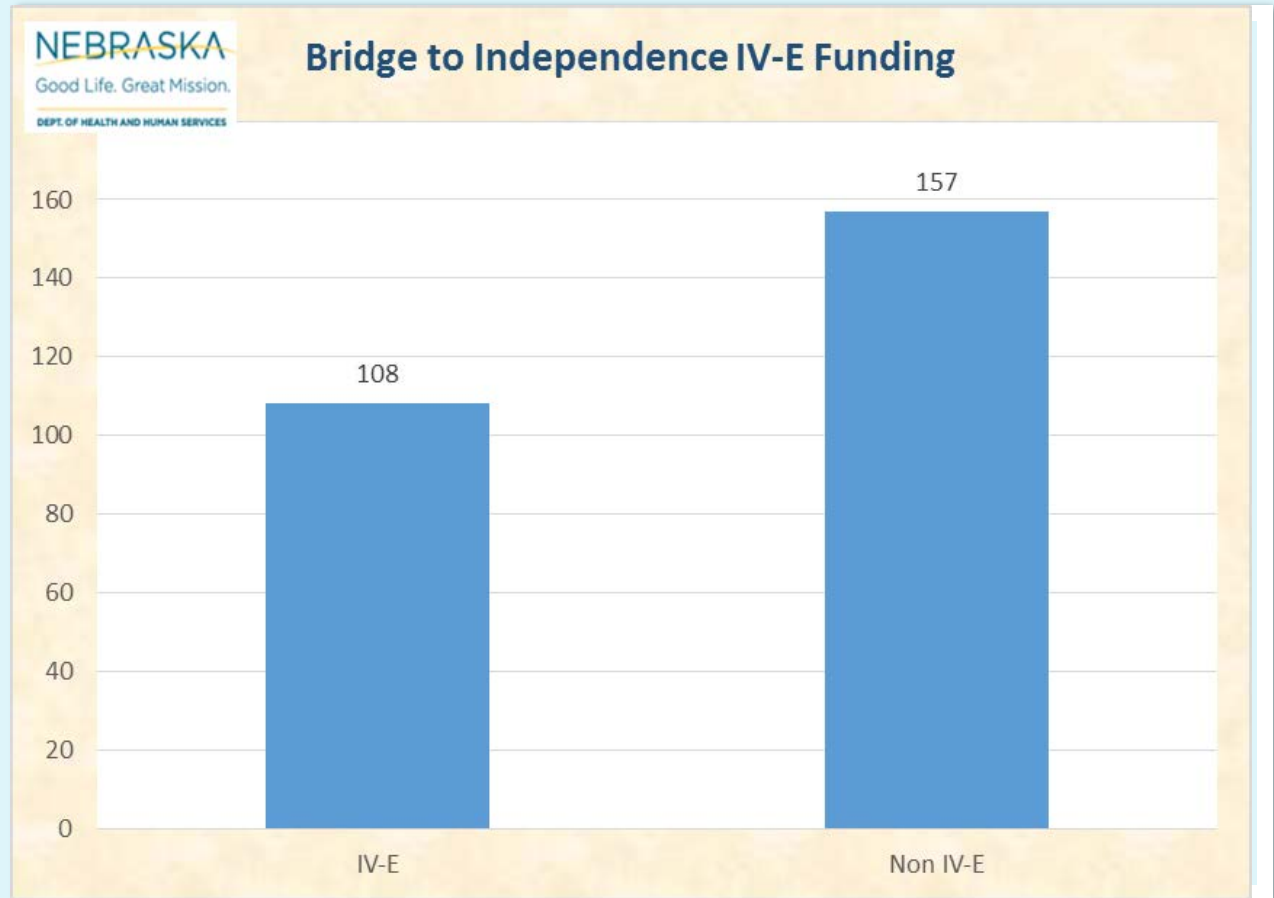
The total number of youth active in the program as of May 6, 2019 was 269.

From January 2018 to September 2018 data was discovered to be inaccurate.



# History

May 2019	IV-E	42%
	Non IV-E	58%
April 2019	IV-E	43%
	Non IV-E	57%
March 2019	IV-E	44%
	Non IV-E	56%
February 2019	IV-E	42%
	Non IV-E	58%
January 2019	IV-E	39%
	Non IV-E	61%
December 2018	IV-E	40%
	Non IV-E	60%
November 2018	IV-E	40%
	Non IV-E	60%
October 2018	IV-E	37%
	Non IV-E	63%
September 2018	IV-E	38%
	Non IV-E	62%
August 2018	IV-E	39%
	Non IV-E	61%
July 2018	IV-E	41%
	Non IV-E	59%
June 2018	IV-E	40%
	Non IV-E	60%
May 2018	IV-E	39%
	Non IV-E	61%
April 2018	IV-E	38%
	Non IV-E	62%



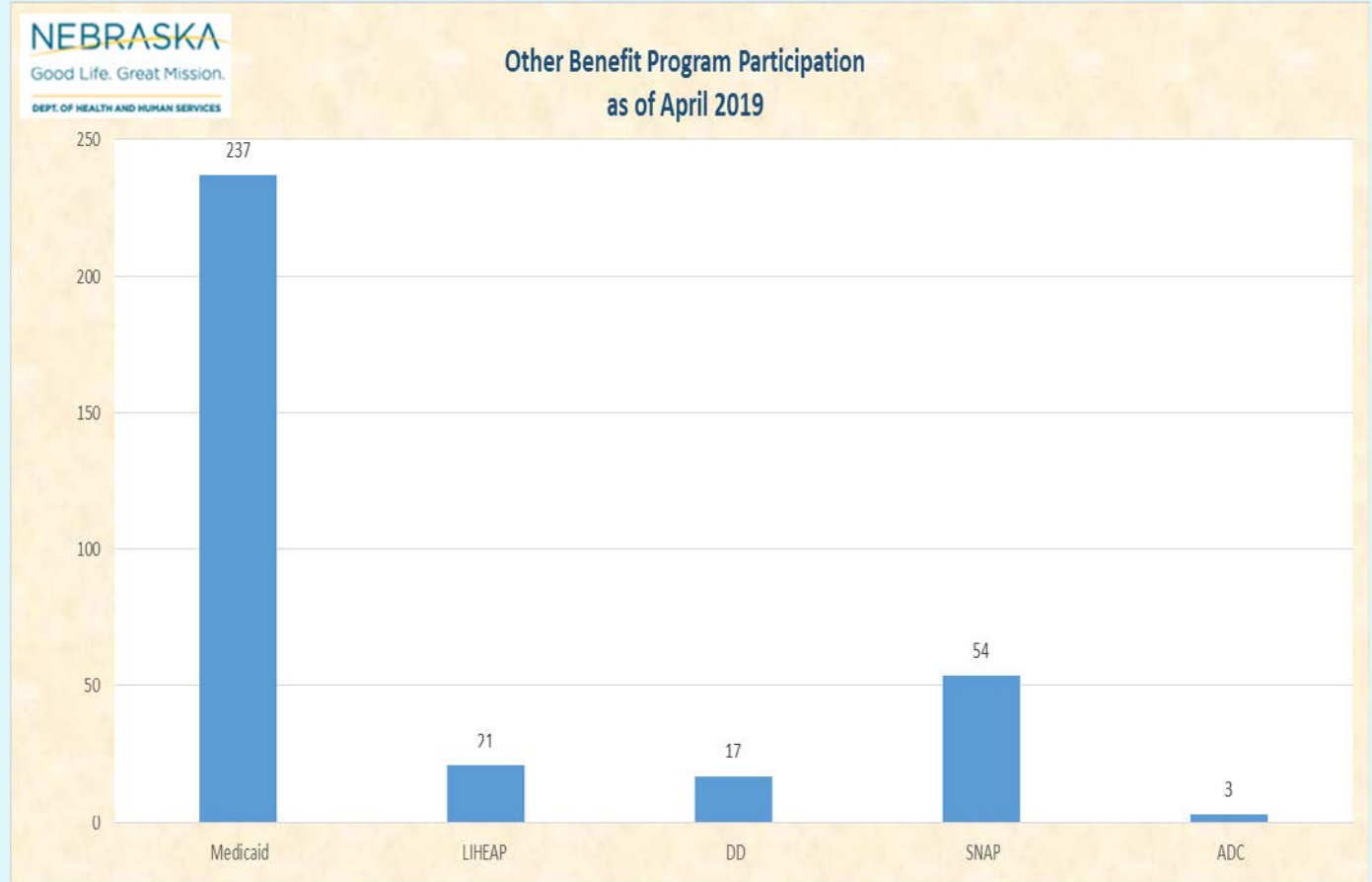
The total number of youth active in the program as of May 6, 2019 was 269.

Strengths/Opportunities:

Barriers:

Action Items:

CQI Team Priority:



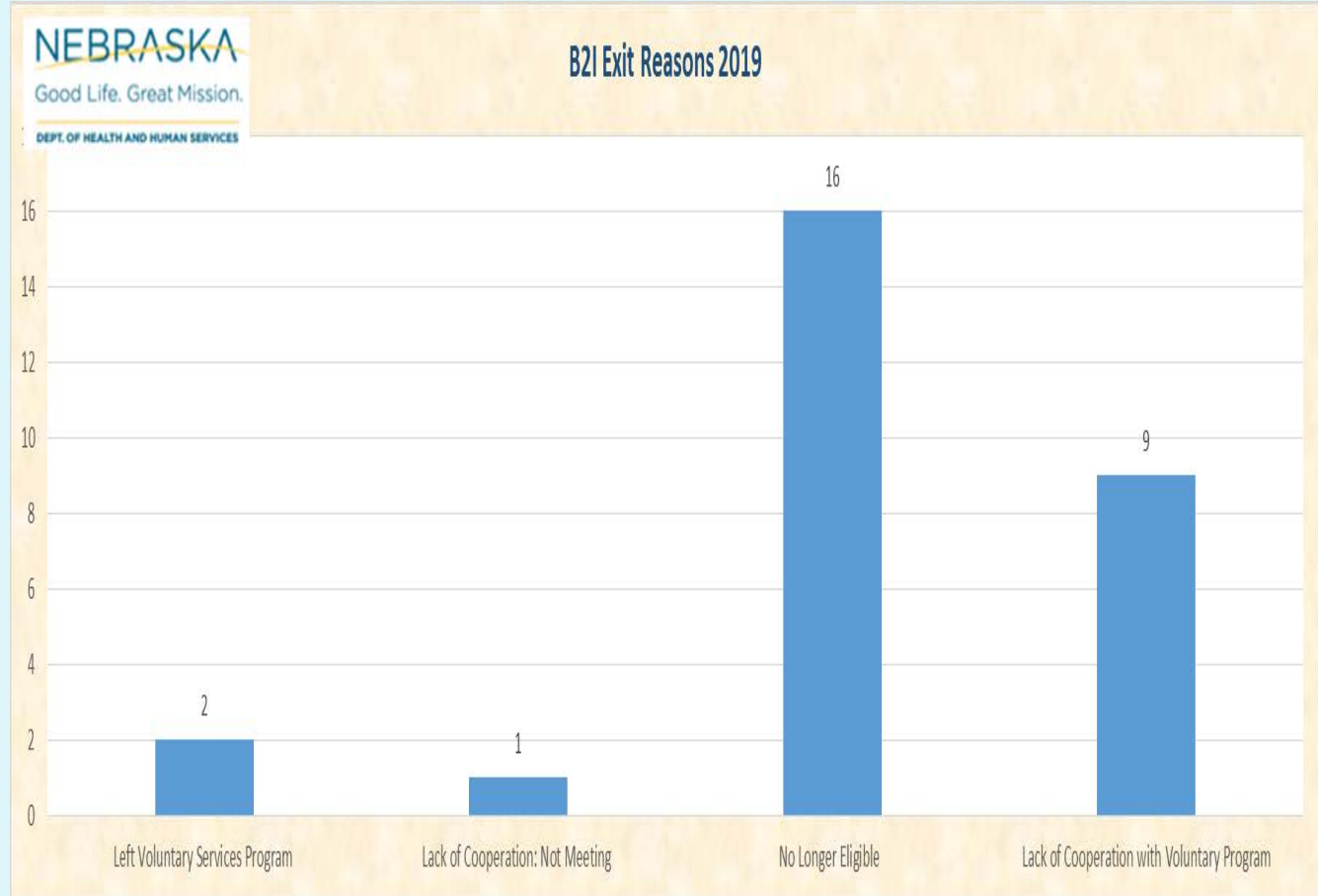
Young adults who have not had a budget run for their fund source are not included.

Strengths/Opportunities:

Barriers:

Action Items:

CQI Team Priority:



The total number of youth active in the program as of May 6, 2019 was 269.

Strengths/Opportunities:

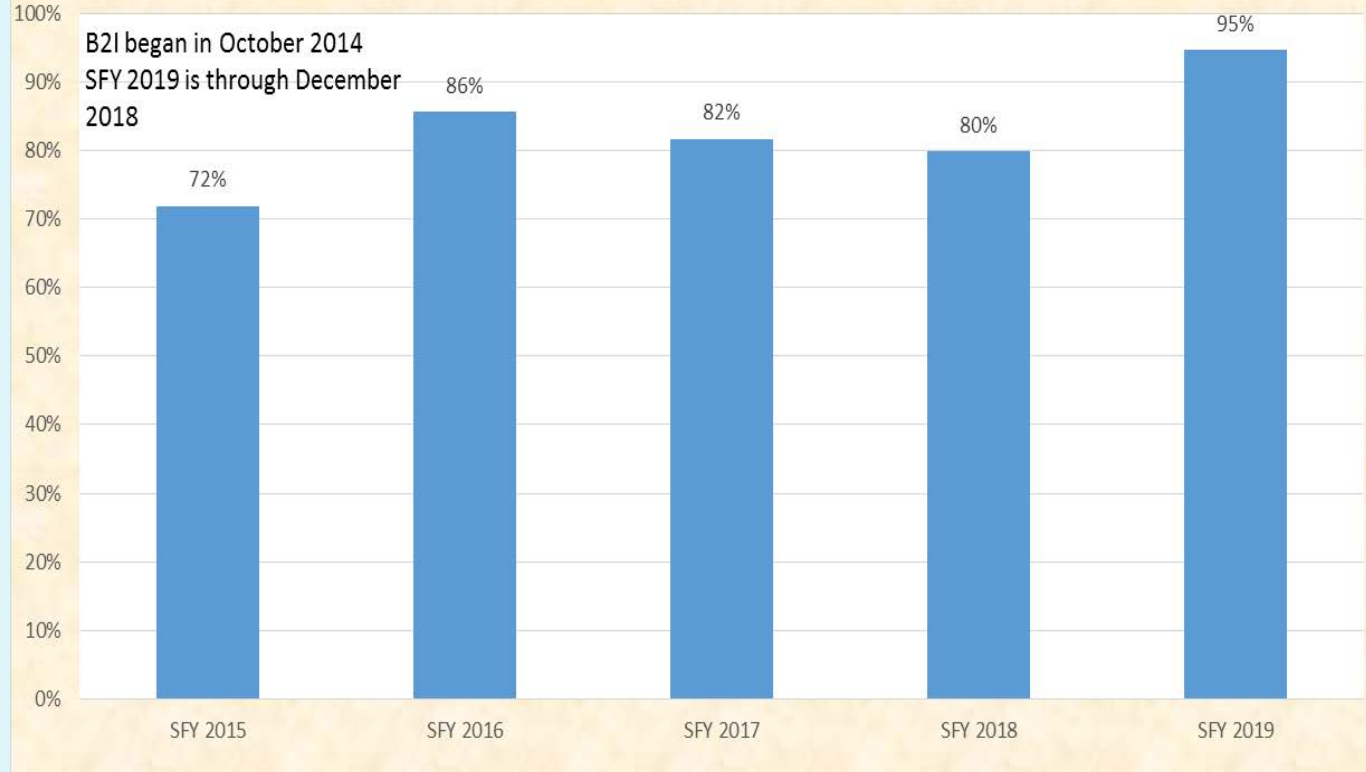
Barriers:

Action Items:

CQI Team Priority:



Percent of State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B2I within 30 Days of Exit



Strengths/Opportunities:

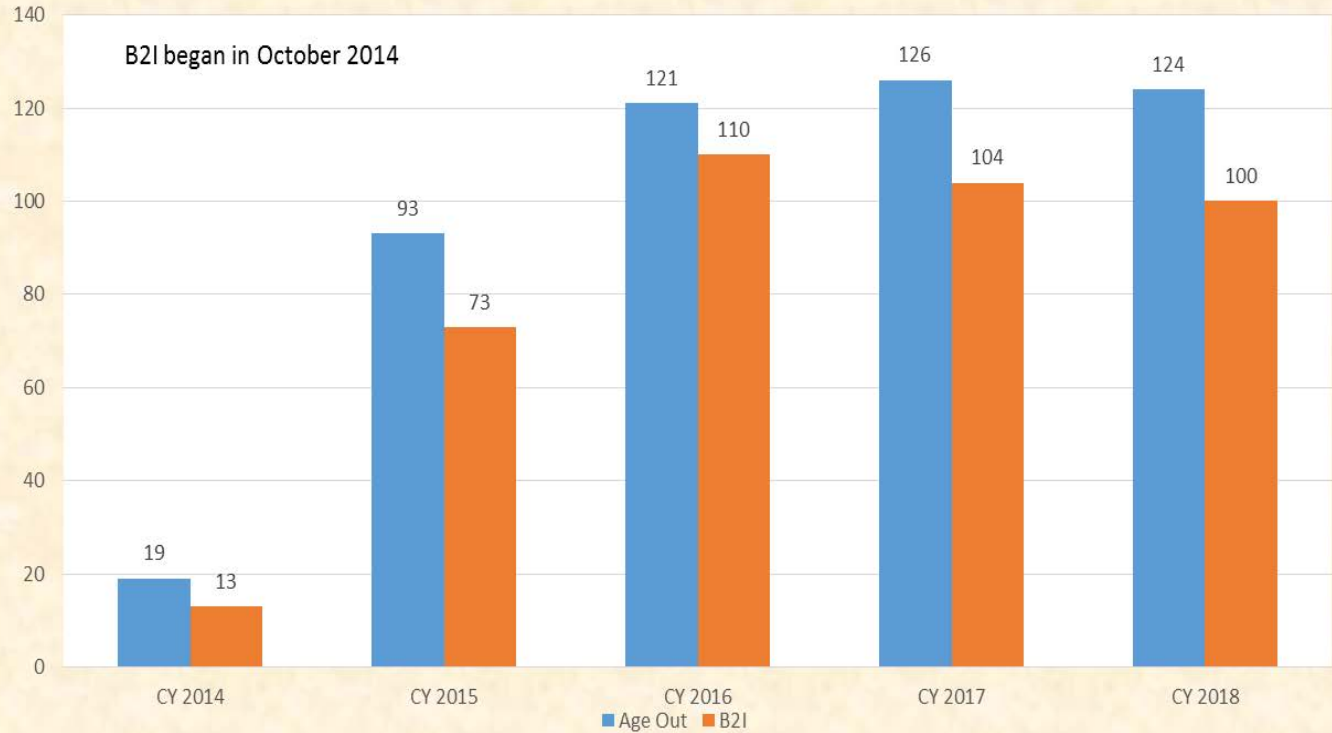
Barriers:

Action Items:

CQI Team Priority:



### State Wards Exiting Care at Age 19 Who Enrolled in B2I within 30 Days of Exit

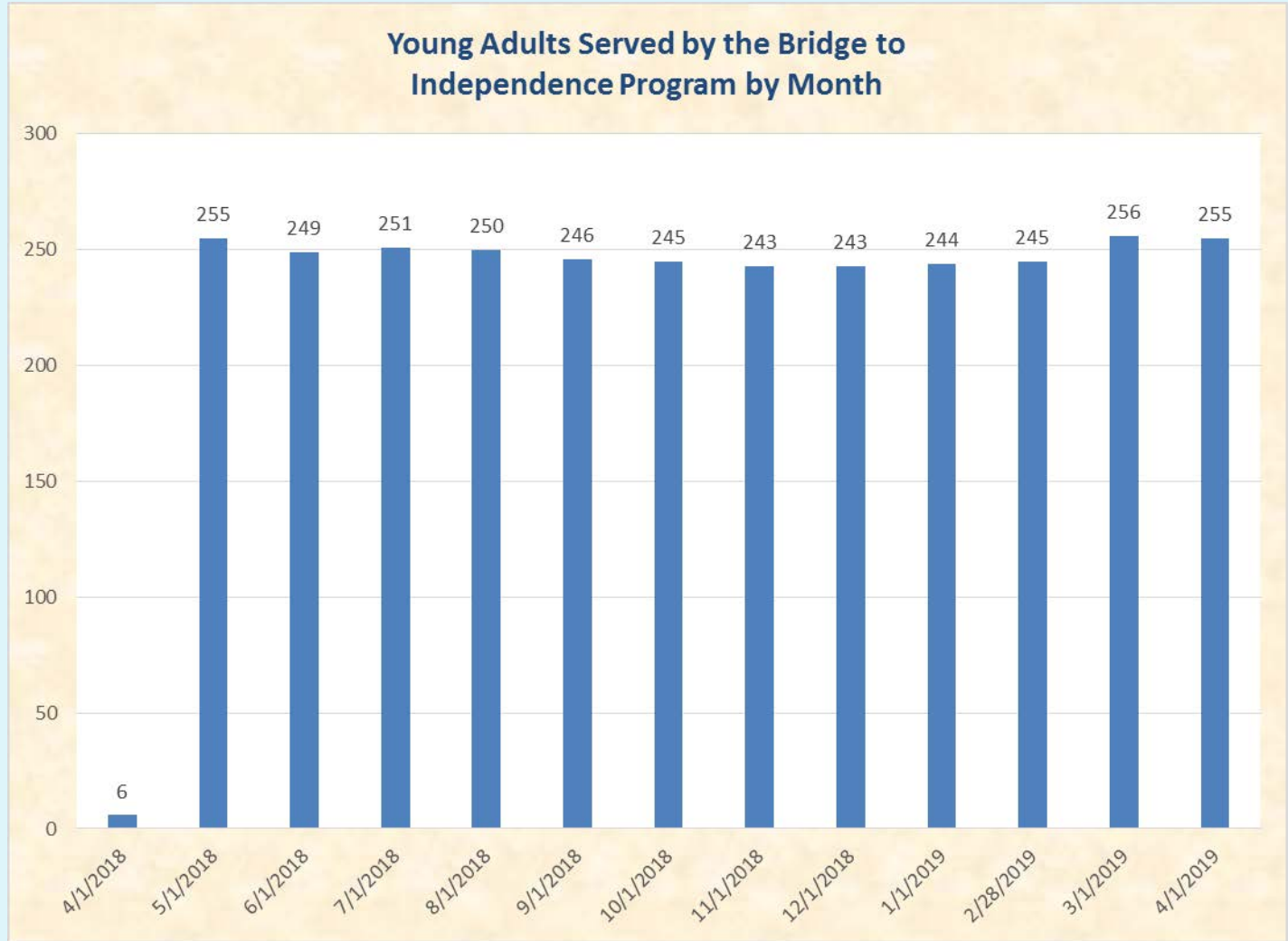


Strengths/Opportunities:

Barriers:

Action Items:

CQI Team Priority:

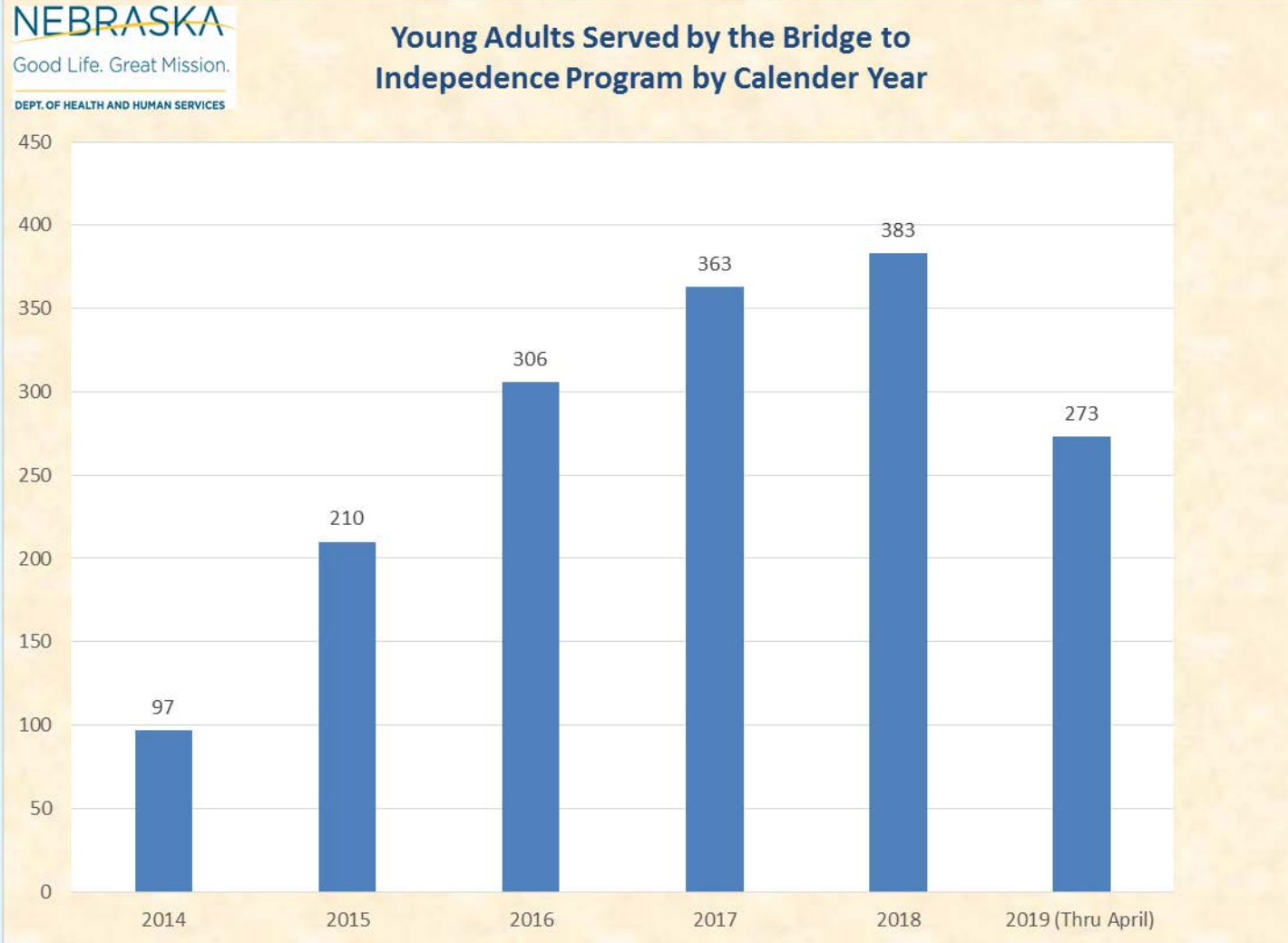


Strengths/Opportunities:

Barriers:

Action Items:

CQI Team Priority:



Empty red-bordered box for notes or comments.

Prepared by:

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services  
Children and Family Services  
Research, Planning and Evaluation Unit  
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