

Bridge to Independence is a voluntary program that provides support for young adults aged 19-21 (or age 18, according to tribal law) as they transition from foster care to adulthood.

Eligibility Requirements for the Bridge to Independence Program:

1. Adjudication Status:

- a. Prior abuse/neglect juvenile adjudication under Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-247 (3)(a) or the equivalent adjudication under tribal law. OR
- b. Prior adjudication under Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-247 (8) whose guardianship or state-funded adoption assistance agreement was disrupted or terminated after the child had attained the age of sixteen. OR
- c. Prior adjudication abuse/neglect adjudication under Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-247(3)(a) or the equivalent adjudication under tribal law who entered a guardianship or adoption at age sixteen or older and had a guardianship or adoption assistance agreement in effect.

Adjudicated to be a juvenile in subdivision (1), (2), or (3)(b) of Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-247 who is living in out-of-home six months prior to the juvenile's nineteenth birthday receives a court order which contains a finding that returning to the family home would be contrary to the juvenile's welfare.

Exception: A juvenile with a current pending motion to revoke probation before the court at the time of the hearing shall not be eligible for the Bridge to Independence Program.

2. Be a Nebraska Resident, unless you were placed by DCFS out of state prior to exiting foster care.
3. Citizenship/lawful presence in the United States.
4. Educational and Employment conditions.
5. In an out of home placement on turning 19 years old or tribal youth who is 18 and attained the age of majority under tribal law OR discharged to Independent Living.
6. Does not meet the level of care for nursing facility, a skilled nursing facility, or intermediate care facility to qualify for funding or eligible to be funded through Developmental Disability Programs.
7. Signing of the Voluntary Services and Support Agreement.

Application Process:

1. Contact a youth's current or previous Child and Family Service Specialist.

2. Apply through an electronic application on http://bridgetoindependence.ne.gov_or_b2i.ne.gov
3. The Office of Probation will send an application/referral to the Bridge to Independence Program.

Services and Support for Young Adults

Young adults who aged out of foster care or were discharged to independent living may receive:

- ❖ Medicaid Coverage if you meet Nebraska Medicaid guidelines.
- ❖ Monthly Stipend to assist with housing or other needs identified by the young adult.
- ❖ Young adult-directed case management services.

Participation Eligibility Requirements

Young adults must be doing at least one of the following to be eligible for this program:

- ❖ Completing high school or an equivalent program (e.g. GED)
- ❖ Enrolled at least part-time in college, community college, or a vocational education program (6 credit hours)
- ❖ 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. internship, volunteering, working with a local career center)
- ❖ You may be excused from these activities if you are unable to do any of those things because of a documented medical condition.

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

- ❖ Sign up for the program. *Young adults will sign the Voluntary Services and Support agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services to participate in the program.*
- ❖ Have monthly contact with an Independence Coordinator. *Independence Coordinator will help young adults identify and meet their individual goals.*
- ❖ Attend permanency review hearings once a year and case reviews by the Foster Care Review Office. *The purpose of the hearings and case reviews is to make sure young adults are getting what they need from the program and that things are going well.*

Adoption, Federal Kinship Guardianship and State Funded Extended Subsidy

- ❖ The young adult entered in an Adoption, Kin-Gap or state-funded guardianship or adoption assistance agreement when the young adult was age 16 or older;
- ❖ The young adult must have an active Adoption, Kin-Gap guardianship or state-funded guardianship or adoption assistance agreement at the time of the young adult's 19th birthday;
- ❖ The young adult had an abuse/neglect juvenile adjudication at the time of adoption or guardianship;
- ❖ The young adult must meet the Citizenship/Lawful presence requirements.

- ❖ The young adult must meet the educational or employment conditions.
- ❖ The young adult must be between the age of 19 and 21.
- ❖ The adoptive parent(s) or relative guardian(s) must sign an agreement, agreeing that the subsidy funds provided by the DHHS and received by the adoptive parent(s) or guardian(s) shall be used for the benefit of the young adult.
- ❖ The young adult must sign a Bridge to Independence Extended Adoption/Kin-Gap or Guardianship Subsidy Mutual Agreement which outlines the participation requirements the young adult must participate in to be eligible for extended subsidy assistance.

Housing Arrangements that may be approved by DHHS for the Bridge to Independence Program

1. Foster Home;
2. Single or shared residence such as an apartment or a house;
3. College dormitory or other post-secondary education housing;
4. Emergency shelter;
5. Parental home;
6. Transitional Living Program;
7. Institutions – *Must be on a voluntary basis and not due to a court-ordered commitment;*
8. Licensed Foster Care Facility;
9. Host Home- *a setting in which a young adult resides in a home of an adult or family (who may or may not be related to the young adult).*

Facts about the Bridge to Independence Program:

1. Former DHHS wards and court approved Probation young adults between ages 19 and 21 or a tribal youth who is eighteen years of age and the young adult has attained the age of majority under tribal law.
2. The young adult has the right to request an attorney or CASA volunteer.
3. The young adult has the right to request an extra permanency review hearing if they feel it is needed.
4. The young adult can exit or re-enter the program at any time prior to their 21st birthday, if they meet eligibility requirements.
5. The young adult can sign up for the program prior to age 19 and transition directly into the program from being a state ward with no interruptions in services or medical coverage.
6. The young adult has a voice.
7. The program is young adult driven.
8. A young adult can be terminated from the Bridge to Independence Program if the young adult does not meet the program guidelines.

A young adult will be provided a 30-day notice of DCFS terminates the young adult from the program for not meeting the program guidelines.