

## **ORGANIZATION INFORMATION**

YouthLink began in 1974 as the Minneapolis Youth Diversion Program, a unit of the Hennepin Area Youth Diversion Programs. In 1978 the agency was incorporated separately as a private, nonprofit corporation. Since the early years the organization has grown and developed multifaceted specialties providing a continuum of services focused on youth truancy and homelessness.

### **- Organization mission and goals**

*Vision:* Empowering youth to shape their futures by providing a safe, supportive, respectful and responsive community of excellence. YouthLink is the place where the END of homelessness and the END of poverty for youth served begins.

*Mission:* YouthLink creates meaningful and healthy relationships with youth and the community so that the doors of opportunity are opened to a future of empowerment and self-sufficiency.

*Goals:* YouthLink's overarching organizational goals include:

- Youth Self-Sufficiency
- Youth Empowerment
- Youth Connectedness

### **- Service Statistics**

Over 3000 youth are served annually through YouthLink's combined continuum of program services. We serve homeless, precariously housed and marginalized youth ages 12- 20. In 2006, YouthLink contacted approximately 3,500 unduplicated runaway and homeless youth through street outreach. Approximately 1,300 homeless or precariously housed youth received services through our drop-in center in 2006. Equal numbers of males and females were served. Close to 85% of youth served are youth of color; the majority of whom are African American.

### **- Current Programs, Activities**

YouthLink provides a one-stop Youth Opportunity Center through five integrated programs. Each program operates as part of a seamless continuum of services – from prevention to independence to empowerment. The five programs include: *NewPath Partners* (truancy intervention services), *Project OffStreets* (drop-in center with social support for homeless youth) *Life Transition* (educational support) *Health and Wellness* (comprehensive health care, and mental health education services) *Youth Housing* (109 units of supportive housing).

### **- Strengths and Accomplishments**

Organizational accomplishments over the past twelve months include:

- *Housing Service Expansion.* YouthLink has partnered with Hearth Connection to provide the Youth Metro Mobile Team, an innovative housing demonstration project that is part of the state wide Long-term Homeless managed care project. The project targets the 'hardest to serve' clients often facing multiple barriers to stability like co-occurring mental health and chemical dependency issues.
- *Mental Health Service Expansion:* YouthLink has actively worked to build its organizational infrastructure and capacity to address the complex mental health needs of youth, including youth residing in our housing units. YouthLink hired a licensed (LICSW) mental health professional to develop the standards and tools necessary to perform diagnostic assessments and treatment plans aligned with medical practice standards.
- *Community Collaboration Expansion.* YouthLink has continued to build community collaborations designed to enhance services for youth. This includes current planning to host onsite post-secondary presence through the Minneapolis Community and Technical College TRIO programs. YouthLink also provides co-leadership of the Hennepin Youth Advisory Group (HYAG); leadership for implementation of youth service delivery in the *Heading Home Hennepin Plan*; service-learning facilitation of at-risk youth at City View

School in north Minneapolis; participation on the Continuum of Care council; and agency representation on the Minneapolis Public Schools Northside Initiative task force on youth services.

- *Strategic Direction & Process.* YouthLink built on previous strategic planning efforts to implement a modified *Balanced Scorecard approach*. Using an external Balanced Scorecard consultant, the agency is implementing an action plan designed to put the vision, mission and goals into action throughout all levels of the agency, including policies, practices and governance.

- ***YouthLink's Relationships with Other Organizations***

YouthLink has a strong history and documented success of intentionally developing community partnerships to strengthen the capacity of onsite support services for youth. Project OffStreets and future program expansions will integrate with our existing extensive list of formalized partners.

Current community partners and services integrated with the Youth Opportunity Center include:

- *African American Child Wellness Institute:* provides cross-cultural consultation regarding youth through the clinical expertise of Dr. Garrett-Akinsanya, a licensed clinical psychologist and director of the institute.
- *Central Community Housing Trust (CCHT):* developer and owner of Archdale and Saint Barnabas apartments; CCHT is the key partner for our Youth Housing partner.
- Hennepin County Health Care for the Homeless: partnership resulting in onsite health clinic services at the YouthLink facility
- *Hearth Connections:* partner supporting the Youth Metro Mobile Team, an innovative housing demonstration project that is part of the state wide Long-term Homeless managed care project.
- *Kulture Klub:* an independent nonprofit arts organization housed at YouthLink. This organization brings exposed homeless youth to artistic expression and excellence.
- *Lutheran Social Services:* Works collaboratively to provide team based case management services across counties, including Ramsey and Hennepin County.
- *Minneapolis Public Schools:* Minneapolis public schools provide client referrals and assistance reuniting homeless youth with the education process.
- *Minneapolis Community and Technical College:* onsite career resources provided onsite at YouthLink through the Educational Opportunity and Talent Search Program.
- *StreetWorks:* collaborative member of the collaborative of 12 youth-serving agencies coordinating street outreach to homeless youth.
- *University of Saint Thomas:* partnership providing consultation services and mental health interns to strengthen agency mental health programming.
- *Youth Law Clinic:* onsite legal information, advice, referral and/or representation. The clinic is managed by staff from Faegre and Benson Law firm and staffed by volunteers from Volunteers Lawyers Network, and the Legal Aid Society.
- *Hennepin Youth Advisory Group (HYAG):* YouthLink leadership co-chairs a collaborative group established by the Hennepin County Board to strengthen and focus youth work.
- *Heading Home Hennepin:* collaborative team putting into action youth recommendations to end homelessness in the city/county in the next ten years. YouthLink leadership co-chairs several of the benchmark groups.