



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:**  
**Lauren Rimestad**  
**The Link**  
**(612) 767-4479**  
[lrimestad@thelinkmn.org](mailto:lrimestad@thelinkmn.org)

### **LOCAL NON-PROFIT “THE LINK” INTRODUCES NEW YOUTH ADVOCACY PROGRAMMING TO REDUCE GANG ACTIVITY IN TWIN CITIES**

*New programs offered via contracts from City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, State of Minnesota to tackle youth delinquency, truancy, gang crime*

**MINNEAPOLIS, November 8, 2007** — As a North Minneapolis resident stuck in the middle of rivaling gang territories, a 17-year-old youth felt like she had no choice but to join a gang to stay alive. Eventually, it all caught up to her. She was put on juvenile probation and referred to a youth advocacy and school support program offered by The Link, a local non-profit dedicated to at-risk youth. After working with The Link for ten months, she is no longer involved in the gang, has maintained perfect attendance at school for the last three months, improved her grades and has been accepted into college.

While her story is not necessarily the norm, it can be with the latest advocacy programming offered by The Link. According to the Minnesota Gang Strike Force, more than 14,500 gang members live in Minnesota, with many originating from the Twin Cities. To reduce gang involvement, crime, delinquency and truancy among youth, the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota are working in partnership with The Link by addressing these issues through prevention and intervention measures. As a result of these government contracts, The Link has expanded its programming by 25 percent to work with gang-involved youth and will be doubling in staff size Jan. 1, 2008.

“Youth gang involvement needs to be addressed at its root,” said Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak. “Youth are looking for guidance and connection, and if we provide them with positive mentors right away, we can make a dent in youth gang crimes and violence.”

The expanded programming offered by The Link not only supports gang-involved youth, but also includes services for family members, probation officers, teachers and community contacts to take on gang involvement, delinquency and truancy head on. Two Gang Prevention Case Managers are integrating one-on-one work with gang involved youth with the aforementioned populations to decrease gang activity and offer positive activities and opportunities as alternatives to gang affiliation.

“We know that our city’s youth are more threatened by gang violence and the pressures of gang involvement than ever before. It is up to us to take action by working together and getting to the bottom of why kids join gangs and what we can do to prevent them from joining,” says Lt. Bryan D. Schafer, juvenile unit commander of the Minneapolis Police Department. Schafer has played an integral role in helping The Link develop the new community and family oriented services.

“Just because an adolescent has gotten in trouble does not limit him or her to a lifetime of living up to that image,” said Executive Director of The Link Deborah Renshaw. “The Link is dedicated to seeing youth simply as people - with potential. When you treat youth with respect and inspire them to find their own positive qualities, they’re more likely to see the potential within themselves. This is a very simple concept we teach in our programming that is unimaginably powerful – we call it Health Realization.”

***Editor’s Note:***

On Nov. 14, 2007, The Link is hosting an open house in its new building (purchased to accommodate the expansion of youth programming) from 4 to 7 p.m. at 1210 Glenwood Avenue in Minneapolis, 55405. During the open house, you will have opportunities to interview the following people about youth gang involvement, delinquency and truancy in the Twin Cities as well as Health Realization and the benefits of the new programming offered by The Link:

- The youth mentioned in this press release (Name cannot be released, however, due to minor status)
- Members of the Minneapolis Police Department
- Deb Renshaw, Executive Director of The Link
- Hennepin County Commissioners
- Minneapolis City Council Members

For information on The Link’s new services or to arrange any interview with any of the people mentioned previously, please contact Lauren Rimestad at (612) 767-4479 or [lrimestad@thelinkmn.org](mailto:lrimestad@thelinkmn.org).

**About The Link**

The Link is a non-profit organization started in 1991 by Jim Marshall and Oscar Reed, former Minnesota Vikings. The organization is dedicated to linking youth, their families and communities to their inner strength by providing life skills, school support, community education, advocacy, family support and mediation, permanent supportive housing and a dynamic network of social services to transform lives. For more information, go to [www.thelinkmn.org](http://www.thelinkmn.org).

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