

INCREASING SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT AND CUTTING DOWN ON YOUTH CRIME



A New Investment Strategy

At a recent legislative hearing the question was asked: “What does the community say we can do about the crime problem?” The answer was simple: “Keep our kids busy.” In other words, people want long term solutions on crime prevention.

While “keeping kids busy” is no easy task, it is certainly worth the effort, commitment and investment. Well-run park & recreation programs, after-school programs, boys and girls clubs are the types of investments we must make in our communities and in the development of our youth. It does not end there however.



We must also attend to the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of our kids. An education and health system focused on children and families is also critical to a thriving community.

What about kids caught up in the web of truancy or criminal activity? They need hope and the assurance that their dreams are achievable. ***It is not enough to tell kids “if you work hard you can be anything you want to be.”*** They need to have a supportive community and to learn how to find their inner-strengths to reach their goals. This is where The Link comes in: They ***help young people to create healthful thinking and gain the confidence needed to achieve goals.***

The United States is now the world leader in the rate of incarceration. The investment in prisons has not yielded a healthier and safer community. It is a high-risk, low-yield strategy.

This is especially true when it comes to children. The earlier we invest in kids, the lower the risk and the greater the yield. It is time to do what is needed. And for those young people struggling with homelessness and truancy, we must turn to supportive community programs like, The Link, which will work with families and help young people find their inner-strengths and transform their lives.

Leonardo Castro is the Chief Public Defender of Hennepin County and serves on The Link’s Board of Directors .

What's being said today about the links between truancy and crime:

“As juvenile crime has risen, habitual truancy increasingly is seen as more than a school problem.”

Star Tribune, 11-19-06

“Action oriented treatment is effective because it *teaches* youth new, pro-social skills to replace the anti-social ones like stealing, cheating and lying, through modeling, practice, and reinforcement.”

—Ed Latessa *“What Works In Reducing Recidivism”*

“I keep getting harassed by the police because I’m not going to school, but I don’t want to go to school in some box with all these disrespectful kids loving their colors and starting fights in the classroom.” —Project Potential Client, Male, 16



Youth for Justice, June 2006 ↑

← Tutor Link, December 2006

These are just two groups offered to Project Potential Participants

Youth crime is becoming more widespread.

Truancy is becoming more devastating to the futures of today's youth.

The Link is expanding our programming to meet these needs.

In 2007, The Link is:

- Changing the name of our Truancy Intervention Program to **Project Potential**. We not only focus on truancy, but we address many challenging issues that are facing today's at-risk youth.
- Adding 2 staff to focus on Gang Reduction.
- Adding 2 staff to work *in* Lincoln Community School, offering truancy prevention and behavioral support to 4th through 6th graders in a high-risk school.
- Expanding our focus to include low-level juvenile offenders.
- Adding Tutor Link, Work Link, and Drug Prevention groups to best serve the needs of this vulnerable and developing population. By ensuring that these youth have the proper support in school, are prepared for the workforce, and have the tools to seek other alternatives to drug and alcohol use, they will be less likely to become truant and involved in criminal activity in the future.

THE MISSION OF THE LINK:

To build a supportive community network that links youth and their families to their inner strength through life skills, education, advocacy, supportive housing, and a dynamic network of social services to transform lives.

The Link achieves this mission through our three main programs:



PROJECT POTENTIAL

provides intensive case management, role modeling, and Health Realization training to youth at high risk for delinquency and drop out.



LINDQUIST APARTMENTS

provides 24 units of permanent, sober, supportive housing for homeless and disabled youth, ages 16 and up.



BUILDING SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

supports and trains students, parents, educators, school administrators and social service providers in Health Realization - a unique approach to leveraging every person's internal wisdom, strength and thought process to surpass any challenge.

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