

2011-2014  
Strategic Plan

Adopted by the YouthLink Board of Directors  
July 2011

Youthlink



Toward a Seamless  
Approach to Homeless  
Youth Service Delivery

# Leadership Message

We are pleased to introduce *YouthLink's 2011-2014 Strategic Plan: Toward a Seamless Approach to Homeless Youth Service Delivery*. Because we are living in a time of shifting trends and expectations, YouthLink's staff and Board of Directors carefully crafted a plan that is intended to be flexible. It provides an overview of YouthLink's work and will guide goals and objectives for the next three years, while being flexible enough to allow changes in course if needed.

The strategic plan begins with a slightly revised mission statement, which better reflects the intent of YouthLink interventions and strategies, and provides the foundation for all subsequent endeavors. It reaffirms our strong commitment to helping youth in crisis—particularly youth experiencing homelessness—to connect with community resources and build self-reliance.

In 2011, YouthLink and its collaborative partners launched the one-stop Youth Opportunity Center (YOC). The YOC model, the first of its kind nationally, uses an innovative service-delivery model that locates multiple nonprofit agencies, services, and resources in one place to provide needed responses in a more efficient, effective, and timely way for youth.

The launching of the YOC signaled YouthLink's overarching goal to obtain efficiency of scale by integrating existing YouthLink interventions and strategies into the YOC model. Both staff and board members view the YOC model as a critical operating approach for YouthLink now and in the future.

YouthLink will continue to build upon its successful interventions and strategies and expand upon its valuable partnerships to leverage new and existing resources. We will work harder than ever with other agencies to target our resources. We are committed

to offering effective programs and making sure that investments are turned into positive results.

The strategic planning process encouraged us to re-think what we believe and analyze how we might have the greatest impact, given our resources and experience. The planning evaluative process involved an assessment of our current work and identification of areas we would like to improve. We recognize that our greatest assets reside in the dedication of our staff and board members and the innovative work that is possible because of the Youth Opportunity Center.

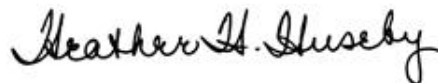
Ensuring the effective continuation of innovative programming and maintaining the necessary partnerships, staffing, leadership, and administration to support the success of the Youth Opportunity Center are our ongoing priorities. Program and budget requirements have been projected and financial plans developed to support our vision.

We appreciate your attention to our work and vision, and specifically this current strategic plan. We hope the plan provides readers with a clear sense of YouthLink's commitment to make a difference in the lives of our youth.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Chase  
Chair, YouthLink Board of Directors



Heather Huseby, Ed.D.  
Executive Director, YouthLink

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# YouthLink Strategic Plan

Each night in Hennepin County, Minnesota, more than 3,000 men, women, children, and young adults are homeless. Of this number, nearly half are children, and reports from the Wilder Research Center suggest that the state's homeless numbers are rising. Statewide, an estimated 13,000 people are homeless on any given night, according to Wilder's research. Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness reported that from July 2007 through June 2008 roughly 5,500 children and young adults in the Minneapolis Public Schools were identified as homeless. YouthLink's service area is the Twin Cities' seven-county metro area (including Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties), although a majority of the youth served are from Hennepin County.

Homelessness negatively impacts the educational achievement of youth and has an adverse effect on many other aspects of their lives, including access to basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and health care. Hennepin County's plan to end homelessness by 2016 includes: (1) prevention efforts to keep people in their current housing; (2) outreach activities to provide housing and other resources; (3) the creation of housing opportunities; (4) access to housing services; (5) programs to help individuals and families build personal income; and (6) enhancing existing service systems. YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center (the collaborative service-delivery model hosted by YouthLink) are essential parts of this larger system of services, working closely with Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness and other collaborative partners to improve services for youth in crisis, particularly youth experiencing homelessness.

Long before Hennepin County announced its plan for ending homelessness, YouthLink had built an innovative culture of helping youth address an array of crises, particularly homelessness, using cross-agency collaboration as a means of selecting and executing the right interventions and strategies to meet these youths' needs. YouthLink has continued

its spirit of innovation over the years, and maintaining an innovative approach was a central topic of discussion during the strategic planning process.

The primary topic addressed by that process was how youth-serving agencies can better fulfill their mission to help end homelessness for young people, and more specifically, how YouthLink can leverage its relationship with the Youth Opportunity Center to best meet the evolving needs of youth in crisis or experiencing homelessness. During 2010-11, those involved in developing this YouthLink strategic plan also explored other topics such as what current trends and needs were affecting youth in the YouthLink service area, what YouthLink was doing to meet them, and what YouthLink should do in the future to meet those needs as they continue to change with population shifts.

The first phase of developing the strategic plan, presented in this document, identified six focus areas, six primary goals, and many potential strategies and indicators or measures. In the second phase, implementation teams and individuals will begin to align individual program plans with the strategic plan. Budget priorities identified in the strategic plan process also will begin to be realized in the actual budget development of YouthLink.

## Purpose

Development of the YouthLink strategic plan was prompted by transitions in agency leadership and discussions within the youth homeless services community regarding major funding changes and the need to build greater capacity. The YouthLink Board of Directors and Executive Staff subsequently adopted a process to create a strategic plan that would serve as a guide for YouthLink during these uncertain times.

The central purposes of the YouthLink strategic plan are to:

- provide a framework for the planning processes within YouthLink programs;
- ensure that program goals align with YouthLink's mission; and
- reflect YouthLink goals in the allocation of resources.



## Two-Phase Development Process

In the first phase of developing the YouthLink strategic plan, consultants specializing in strategic planning with nonprofits assisted the board of directors and staff leadership in framing the subsequent planning discussions. These groups deliberated together and separately at a series of meetings between December 2010 and April 2011. The consultants also conducted interviews with members of YouthLink partner organizations, YouthLink funders, City Council members, a Hennepin County commissioner, Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness staff, and a focus group composed of YouthLink participants. These sessions gathered feedback about YouthLink's strengths, opportunities, and challenges. In an April meeting, board members and designated staff reviewed interview and focus group data, shared ideas about strategic goals and strategies, and reached consensus on the key concepts to be included in YouthLink's vision, mission, and values statements.

During the second phase of developing the strategic plan in May and June of 2011, a full draft of the plan was completed. YouthLink executive staff and the board chair monitored the drafting of the strategic plan, bringing together a variety of input; synthesizing ideas on goals, strategies, and performance indicators; and circulating drafts among YouthLink staff and board members. Presentation of a draft of the strategic plan to staff and a vote on the final plan at the July meeting of the board of directors completed this phase.

# Agency Overview

YouthLink began its work in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1974 as a unit of the Hennepin County Area Youth Diversion Programs. Incorporated as a nonprofit in 1978, the agency today provides a continuum of services focused on youth in crisis, including youth who are homeless, precariously housed, marginalized, or at risk of homelessness. Annually, YouthLink serves more than 3,500 youth between the ages of 16 and 21. In March 2011, YouthLink and its collaborative partners launched the Youth Opportunity Center (YOC) on the YouthLink campus. The YOC—the first of its kind nationally—uses a service-delivery model that co-locates multiple nonprofit agencies; educational, county, and city services; and other resources in one place, to provide needed interventions and strategies in a more efficient, effective, and timely manner for youth in crisis, particularly youth experiencing homelessness. By May of 2011, the number of new youth using YOC services had quadrupled, increasing from 50 new visits in January to more than 200.

The YOC model has positively impacted how YouthLink operates, and will continue to shape YouthLink's operations in the future. YouthLink provides outreach, crisis, and basic-needs services through its drop-in center and works closely with Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness and other collaborative partners to provide needed resources quickly and effectively.

YouthLink and its collaborative partners offer an array of intervention services that are often the first steps toward long-term stabilization and transition. YouthLink considers building partnerships with community, government, and other agencies a central priority in helping better meet the needs of youth. Such services include onsite preparation for completing high school, or earning a GED (General Educational Development diploma), and planning for

college; family reunification efforts; mental health services; onsite medical and legal services; housing referrals and placement; and connections to community-based resources.

YouthLink is one of the largest providers of housing support in the Twin Cities, including providing support services to youth living in 111 studio and one-bedroom onsite housing units and 32 housing units at scattered sites. Youth are referred by themselves, street outreach workers, shelter programs, families, and community agencies. YouthLink's service area is the Twin Cities' seven-county metro area (including Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties), although a majority of the youth served are from Hennepin County.

## Mission

The mission of YouthLink is building healthy relationships with youth and the community to address youths' urgent needs so that doors of opportunity are opened to futures of empowerment, connectedness, and self-reliance.

## Vision

The vision of YouthLink is empowering youth to shape their futures by providing a safe, supportive, respectful, and responsive community of excellence. YouthLink is a place where the END of homelessness and the END of poverty begin for the youth served.

## Service Philosophy

YouthLink was created and exists to serve youth in crisis and to confront the social dynamics that foster youth homelessness. Homelessness is traumatic for all who experience it, producing physical and psychological effects that impact a person's self-esteem, trust, security, sense of control, and relationships within the larger community.

YouthLink is a community-based agency that thrives because of its partnerships. YouthLink embraces a youth-directed continuum of care philosophy, identifying and responding to youths' issues in terms of the trauma they have experienced in their lives (ie. trauma-informed services). It is a community that acknowledges the rights of young people and breaks down systemic and personal barriers in order to enhance their quality of life.

YouthLink maintains a holistic view of youth, promotes self-reliance, and advocates for every youth's right to:

- receive non-judgmental support;
- choose his or her own pace and path for growth;
- privacy and confidentiality;
- build self-advocacy, empowerment, and self-determination skills;
- develop and realize a successful passage to adulthood; and
- receive accurate and current information and resources.

YouthLink strives to be a fully accessible, barrier-free community that guides youth through the passage to successful and productive adulthood. It acknowledges diversity and works to eliminate barriers by asking youth and the community for input and service to help YouthLink operate effectively.

YouthLink is an integral part of a larger system, encompassing all services and professions that come into contact with youth who are homeless. YouthLink is committed to interacting with this larger system in a professional and responsible manner.

## Core Values

The core values by which YouthLink operates are the following:

- **Youth-Centered**  
Aligning everything we do with what is best for the youth we serve.
- **Trust, Integrity, and Honesty**  
Valuing trust and honesty at all levels of the agency and being responsible stewards of public and private resources.
- **Diversity**  
Welcoming, valuing, and promoting diversity among staff, youth, and the community; believing that YouthLink's diversity strengthens it.
- **Learning**  
Encouraging continual learning and growth for youth, our staff, and leadership.
- **Collaboration**  
Forging mutually productive and responsive partnerships with one another and the community.

# Trends in Homeless Youth Services

An important part of developing the strategic plan was gathering information from interviews with key informants and stakeholders—and reviewing reports about YouthLink and the youth services field more generally—to determine national and local trends that have an impact on the health and well-being of youth who are homeless, as well as on YouthLink as an agency. All sources agreed that, to continue YouthLink’s already-long list of impressive accomplishments, its programs will need to adapt constantly to the changing nature of homeless services for youth and to evolve in its understanding of the myriad issues faced by young people without homes so as to meet its mission to “address youths’ urgent needs so that doors of opportunity are opened.”

A review of the collected data revealed six major themes: (1) the limited research available on homeless youth; (2) the need for agencies to be flexible and nimble to deal with shrinking and shifting sources of funding; (3) the necessity of strong board leadership and advocacy; (4) the importance and success of the Youth Opportunity Center; (5) the factors to be considered in the redesign of systems among agencies serving youth; and (6) the unmet service needs of the increasing number of homeless youth.

## Limited Homeless Youth Research

More—and more-focused—research is needed to help resolve the problems of youth homelessness. Such research, for example, could examine whether certain types of interventions are more effective with particular groups of homeless youth (e.g., runaways, foster kids aging out of the system, youth who are pregnant or parents). Research can also be used to build an evaluation framework to estimate the social return on investment (SROI) of a given service-delivery model and compare its effectiveness to more traditional models. The application of an evaluation framework can help YouthLink manage its resources more effectively and hasten the adoption of an evidence-based youth service model in other locations.

## Flexibility and Nimbleness in Dealing with Changing Funding

At a time of steadily increasing demand for services amid rising expenses, many of today’s nonprofits have experienced declining or stagnant funding due to a drop in both donations and government funding during this deep recession. This economy necessitates that nonprofit organizations remain flexible and engage in critical self-examination to ensure that programs are clearly aligned with their missions. Nonprofit experts also encourage engaging in cost-saving activities such as strong collaborations and the sharing of services. Despite signs that the recession may be leveling off, uncertainty still remains. More than ever, it is important for nonprofit organizations to demonstrate their value by assessing and strengthening services and illustrating an economic return on investment for investors and donors.

## **Strong Board Leadership and Advocacy**

While having a strong board is important to a nonprofit organization at all times, this is especially true during a recession. A strong board can supplement the skills and knowledge of agency leaders and help agencies overcome setbacks or navigate very difficult issues. Such a board can also help create a greater and more positive visibility for an agency and contribute different skills and perspectives. Strong boards can open doors to business contacts that the agency's executive team may lack, including to potential new investors.

## **Success of the Youth Opportunity Center**

The Youth Opportunity Center is a multi-agency collaboration that was envisioned by the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County's plan to end homelessness. Its success rests with the many agencies that make up the homeless youth services system. Stakeholders are expecting participating agencies to build strong collaborations that will ensure the center's effectiveness. It is anticipated that YouthLink will play a key role in broadening the range of services and expertise available through the center and will work closely with Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness and other collaborative partners to communicate the successes of this collaborative service-delivery model.

## **System Redesign**

There was much discussion among the informants and the reviewed reports about the need for all homeless youth service agencies to spend time working on a redesign of the homeless youth service system. These discussions have been fueled by the sluggish economy, changes in the priorities of funders, and the Metro Youth Systems Redesigned Counsel. Many system stakeholders believe that a focus on systems thinking, better communication, standard protocols, and strong collaborations will lead to a more effective service-delivery system. YouthLink began working on system redesign when the Youth Opportunity Center was established and continues that work with this strategic plan.

## **Unmet Service Needs**

The number of homeless youth is increasing. The Wilder Research Center, which tracks homeless youth and families statewide, reported that there are 3,900 homeless children in Minnesota each night, the largest number since Wilder began tracking that data in 1991. This number also would be much higher if it included all of the youth who are homeless without their families. Agency leaders and youth interviewed as part of developing YouthLink's strategic plan reported an increase in pregnant teens who are without homes, gaps in services for 10- to 14-year-olds, and a need for additional services for 21- to 24-year-olds.

# Response to the Trends

The strategic planning process examined how YouthLink's goals and objectives were accomplished in the past and how they will be managed going forward. Its central conclusion was that YouthLink is facing a changing landscape that makes imperative a corresponding strategic change in how YouthLink sets its priorities and conducts its business. The primary driving force is: A desire to confront the most critical problems in the most effective manner. YouthLink's role is to work in partnership with local youth-serving agencies and government to identify the most pressing challenges confronting homeless youth and to provide state-of-the-art services and innovative strategies and approaches for dealing with these challenges.

As one response to this planning process, YouthLink has embraced the Youth Opportunity Center (YOC) business model as a strategic and efficient way of operating so as to better address the needs of youth in crisis or experiencing homelessness. YouthLink championed the development and establishment of the YOC, including providing overall coordination and management and aligning YouthLink's four core service areas—Crisis Intervention/Basic Needs, Health/Wellness, Education/Employment, and Housing—with the YOC operating model. YouthLink views the YOC as a one-stop, multi-service center whose success depends on multi-agency collaboration that broadens the range of services and expertise available to youth without homes.

Within just a few months, the Youth Opportunity Center's business model has strengthened the organizational capacity of YouthLink and helped define the continuum of services that YouthLink offers. YouthLink provides onsite educational support to:

- help prepare youth for high school, General Educational Development diploma (GED), and college;
- support family reunification;

- offer onsite medical and legal services;
- provide housing referral and placement services; and
- facilitate connections to community-based resources by working in partnership with the community, local agencies, and government.

YouthLink recognizes that continuing to effectively and efficiently address the challenges of youth in crisis, especially those experiencing homelessness, will require sustained collaborative efforts on the part of YouthLink and YOC collaborators.

YouthLink supervisors and directors have assessed all agency services during the strategic planning process and, as will be seen in the next section, provided actionable recommendations to improve and measure program and service effectiveness that will be incorporated into YouthLink's operational plans and activities. These recommendations assume that most YouthLink programs will continue in the future, without a significant increase in funding.

Therefore, YouthLink has adjusted its business model to provide the maximum return on investment for donor dollars, which requires that YouthLink make the most of collaborative opportunities and that its interventions and strategies be based on specific, measurable objectives, and regular evaluation to assess their effectiveness.

YouthLink's strategic plan provides a framework for managing progress by planning and setting priorities. The next two sections present the goals, objectives, performance measures, and strategies that YouthLink will pursue, as well as the management and administrative steps necessary to implement them and ensure success.

# 2011-2014

## Strategic Goals and Objectives

YouthLink's strategic goals and objectives reflect its priorities and resources. They are broad, flexible, and represent planned outcomes that contribute directly to our mission. YouthLink views itself as a partner in the fight against youth homelessness and associated issues and is committed to carrying out its mission in a collaborative way with other agencies serving homeless youth.

YouthLink's success is measured in how well it collaborates across the many agencies serving youth who are homeless. Two key themes are represented in YouthLink's goals and objectives: (1) that YouthLink is committed to working collaboratively with other youth homeless services; and, (2) that YouthLink is committed to strengthening its existing collaborative efforts. YouthLink's strategic goals, listed below, and relevant performance measures are described in more detail on the following pages.

### Goal 1: Interventions/Strategies

- Foster innovation and maintain relevancy for all YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center participants.
- Become experts on data about homeless youth.

### Goal 2: Staffing

- Ensure high-quality interventions, strategies, and staffing; and increase emphasis on training and staff development.

### Goal 3: Community Collaborations

- Continue existing collaborations with the Youth Opportunity Center and others and build new ones that enable youth to receive coordinated, integrated homeless services.
- Encourage resource sharing among YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center partners, including shared services agreements, development of joint fundraising proposals, and collaboration on contracts, purchases, and services.

### Goal 4: Agency Visibility

- Increase community awareness and understanding of YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center programs and services.
- Obtain greater visibility among key stakeholders for the work of YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center.

### Goal 5: Financial Stability/Sustainability

- Improve and sustain the strong financial position of YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center.
- Design and implement a comprehensive fundraising plan.

### Goal 6: Governance

- Focus on supporting priorities of the strategic plan.

## Goal 1: Interventions/Strategies

### Foster innovation and maintain relevancy for all YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center participants.

YouthLink is proud of its interventions and strategies and will continue to effectively manage them and its work with the Youth Opportunity Center. YouthLink will use its voice, resources, and programs to identify, develop, and prioritize innovative strategies for improving program effectiveness and to promote the use of evidence-based practices. This goal encompasses the development of reliable statistics and the design and conduct of a wide range of research studies, program assessments, and evaluations. As a result, programs will have sufficient information on performance to make improvements. The following objectives will be achieved in support of this strategic goal:

- 1.1.** Provide youth with access to timely and affordable housing, health, education, legal, and other resources that are culturally, medically, and developmentally appropriate.
- 1.2.** Provide the necessary housing preparation and acquisition skills and successful, current, and relevant lifelong learning options to meet youths' needs.
- 1.3.** Meet federal funding requirements for emergency beds by partnering with local housing nonprofits.
- 1.4.** Create relationships with businesses and nonprofits to enhance housing, education, and career and vocational interventions and strategies; and to build pathways for youth to make successful transitions into adulthood.

### Become experts on data about homeless youth.

- 1.5.** Clearly define and map tasks and responsibilities associated with data collection and reporting processes at YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center.
- 1.6.** Identify, obtain, implement, and sustain appropriate data collection, reporting, and project tracking.
- 1.7.** Continue to hear from youth regarding how they perceive programs and services in an effort to be respectful of, and accommodating to, their needs.
- 1.8.** Engage with local colleges, universities, and experts to conduct methodologically sound research that supports and advances YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center programs and administrative decision-making and which, at the same time, documents what works (e.g., successful preventive interventions).
- 1.9.** Use resilience-based research frameworks and involve or consult with youth who are homeless at every stage of research studies, including study design.
- 1.10.** Periodically review YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center services to promote and sustain innovation, integration, and learning.
- 1.11.** Use and share the learning from research and evaluation with partners and the broader community.

### Goal 1 Performance Measures

Below are the performance measures that will be used to assess progress in achieving this strategic goal:

- Percentage of youth enrolled in programs and services.
- Percentage of youth showing progress on YouthLink's continuum of 25 self-sufficiency indicators. The range of indicator scale moves from "in crisis" to "thriving."
- Percentage increase or decrease in public cost of youth receiving services through YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center. This will be measured by the Return on Investment (ROI) formula.
- Percentage of change in successful program or services completions.
- Percentage of change in youth homeless rates.
- Percentage of job placements.
- Percentage of youth still in contact with YouthLink two years after successful exit from the program; Percentage of these youth completing follow-up survey.
- 100% of staff participates in periodic evaluation of programs and services.
- Percentage of evaluation completers indicating interventions and strategies meet YouthLink assessment criteria.
- Percentage of evidence based research completed and shared. Evidence-based research is completed.
- Percentage of completed ROI research results shared to a minimum of 20 external sources, conferences, etc.
- Percentage of youth surveys completed indicating alignment with common indicators of success as defined by the youth systems redesign.



## Goal 2: Staffing

**Ensure high-quality interventions, strategies, and staffing and increase emphasis on training and staff development.**

YouthLink has retained and attracted employees and volunteers who are outstanding and share our vision and values. Staff and volunteers are the essence of YouthLink. They communicate and interact well with youth and have a genuine interest in youths' well-being. Staff have a natural instinct for collaboration and excel in creating innovative ways to work with youth. We have a human resources framework in place that ensures we are competitive with other nonprofits and recognize and reward staff excellence. The following objectives will be achieved in support of this strategic goal:

- 2.1.** Foster a workplace culture that promotes personal health and wellness for all staff.
- 2.2.** Develop a succession planning strategy and engage in succession planning to grow the future leadership of the agency.
- 2.3.** Maintain an innovative workforce by offering training to provide workers with the tools required to deliver high-quality, youth-centered housing and housing-related services.
- 2.4.** Review all employees' progress annually.

## Goal 2 Performance Measures

Below are the performance measures that will be used to assess progress in achieving this strategic goal:

- Percentage of change in staff retention rates.
- Percentage of executive position openings filled by internal candidates.
- Percentage of staff participating in staff development offerings.
- Evaluate progress by analyzing annual performance reviews of 100% of staff.



## Goal 3: Community Collaborations

**Continue existing collaborations with the Youth Opportunity Center and others, and build new ones that enable youth to receive coordinated, integrated homeless services.**

YouthLink is committed to building strong, successful collaborations with the Youth Opportunity Center and the larger community of organizations working to end youth homelessness. Each of these organizations has a unique set of experiences, research, and knowledge regarding youth homelessness and offers creative solutions. Such collaborations can resolve issues around homelessness and prevent youth from languishing in the system for extended periods of time. Separately, YouthLink and its partners will not be able to resolve the problems of homelessness, but working together we can improve the way homelessness is viewed and bring about social awareness, the adoption of new policies, and proven methods for serving the metro area's underserved youth populations.

Building and maintaining partnerships with the Youth Opportunity Center and community agencies is a main priority. YouthLink will build and maintain community collaborations that extend the work of the agency, focusing on collaborative strategies associated with the YOC, and placing special emphasis on common areas of interest. The following objectives support this strategic goal:

- 3.1.** Work collaboratively with the Youth Opportunity Center and community-based organizations and schools to foster productive relationships that benefit youth.
- 3.2.** Collaborate with Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness to advance the success of the Youth Opportunity Center.

- 3.3.** Collaboratively design and implement a strategic process for a community input and engagement process for the Youth Opportunity Center.

**Encourage resource sharing among YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center partners, including shared services agreements, development of joint fundraising proposals, and collaboration on contracts, purchases, and services.**

- 3.4.** Collaborate with other partners to accelerate the collaborative work of the Youth Opportunity Center and create and maintain an integrated planning and budgeting process that is focused on outcomes and provides an effective tool for setting goals, allocating resources, tracking progress, measuring results, and identifying areas for improvement.
- 3.5.** Continue to provide continuity of support and case management so that youth experience a seamless transition between agencies and across service systems.
- 3.6.** Continue to advocate for needed policy changes across service systems serving youth that are homeless.

### Goal 3 Performance Measures

Below are the performance measures that will be used to assess progress in achieving this strategic goal:

- Monitor collaboration and requests for agency services.
- Number of contacts with new community organizations.
- Number and outcomes of partnerships.
- Number of collaborative grants and contracts received.
- Amount of joint fundraising achieved.
- Completion of a community engagement process.
- Implementation and maintenance of joint budgeting and planning processes.
- Partner surveys.
- Youth feedback.



## Goal 4: Agency Visibility

### Increase community awareness and understanding of YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center programs and services.

YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center are interested in expanding community awareness and understanding of homeless youth issues. The need for community education is necessary to reach a broader segment of youth, alert the community to the prevalence of homelessness among diverse youth populations, and to increase the community's knowledge of available services. YouthLink staff, board members, and participants will build awareness about YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center among potential participants, the news media, community agencies, schools, the faith community, and other opinion leaders. YouthLink will employ the following objectives:

- 4.1.** Continue ongoing awareness campaigns and events.
- 4.2.** Build and support a youth team in the use of social media to help youth in crisis learn about YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center services.
- 4.3.** Distinguish YouthLink's drop-in services from the Youth Opportunity Center.
- 4.4.** Evaluate and refine marketing and communications efforts on an ongoing basis to enhance effectiveness of outreach, participants' use of programs and services, business and industry partnerships, grant writing, and fundraising.

### Obtain greater visibility among key stakeholders for the work of YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center.

- 4.5.** YouthLink's Board will offer to host collaborative meetings with the boards of other related service agencies to advance the success of the Youth Opportunity Center.
- 4.6.** YouthLink's Board will build relationships with key community members on behalf of the agency and play a significant role in the agency's fundraising plan.

### Goal 4 Performance Measures

Below are the performance measures that will be used to assess progress in achieving this strategic goal:

- Tracking results of marketing strategies (e.g., number of news articles, op-eds, blogs, TV/radio interviews).
- Monitoring attendance at, and effectiveness of, events.
- Increasing participation in national conferences.

## Goal 5: Financial Stability/Sustainability

### Improve and sustain the strong financial position of YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center.

YouthLink is engaged in improvement activities intended to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of its business practices and collaboration with the Youth Opportunity Center and others. Escalating costs associated with programs and administration are being identified through intensive reviews of a range of agency operations, with the expectation of maintaining a consistent operating budget. The strategic plan provides a framework to focus fundraising and allocation of funds to optimize the return on investment of investors' dollars. YouthLink will employ these objectives to meet this goal:

- 5.1.** Maintain operational and financial systems and internal controls outlined in the financial audit.
- 5.2.** Analyze YouthLink's revenue sources, project month-by-month cash flow, anticipate any shortfalls, build in flexibility for extenuating circumstances, and create a workable cash reserve policy.
- 5.3.** Generate the income to build the cash reserve as soon as possible.
- 5.4.** Make sufficient funding available to collect data and evaluate interventions and strategies.
- 5.5.** Identify and take advantage of collaborative funding opportunities.
- 5.6.** Maintain cost-cutting measures which have been previously initiated.
- 5.7.** Establish additional cost-cutting measures as required by innovation, system changes, and funding strategies.

### Design and implement a comprehensive fundraising plan.

- 5.8.** YouthLink's Board of Directors is a full partner in strategically raising funds for the agency.
- 5.9.** Focus on expanding YouthLink's individual donor base.
- 5.10.** Maximize the use of all fundraising tactics available, including implementing annual and major giving programs, intentional donor communications, effective use of volunteers, and purposeful marketing efforts.
- 5.11.** Launch new fundraising initiatives.
- 5.12.** Explore opportunities to involve the business community in filling vital roles beyond traditional donations and volunteerism.
- 5.13.** Utilize donor software to maintain administrative records in one central database.

Below are the performance measures that will be used to assess progress in achieving this strategic goal:

- 90% of vendors will indicate billing process has improved on annual survey of services.
- 100% of operational, financial, and internal control systems have been changed to match Clifton Larson Allen industry standards of operation by December 1, 2012.
- Balanced budget achieved minimum of three consecutive years.
- Individual donor base expanded by 25% annually for each of the next three years.
- Individual contributions and corporate dollars will increase by 300% by 2015.
- Foundation support increased by 15% by 2015.
- Business involvement increased by 25% by 2015.
- Collaborative funding increased by 15% by 2015.
- 100% of service divisions, administrative unit, YOC partners follow strategic fundraising, communications, and stewardship plan.



## Goal 6: Governance

### Focus on supporting priorities of the strategic plan.

YouthLink's Board of Directors will focus acutely on selected priorities that will have the most significant positive impact for youth and staff members. The board will continue its ongoing responsibility areas and focus on details supporting top priorities in this strategic plan according to the objectives below:

- 6.1.** Periodically review and update all board policies.
- 6.2.** Implement the newly updated *Accounting Policy & Procedures Manual* and Gift Acceptance Policy.
- 6.3.** Collaborate with other homeless youth agency boards to advance the Youth Opportunity Center's success.
- 6.4.** Actively use policies and procedures to ensure YouthLink's accountability to stakeholders.
- 6.5.** Reenergize the board self-evaluation process and evaluate the board's performance comprehensively and regularly.
- 6.6.** Individual board members will support YouthLink with a personally significant financial contribution and be strong strategic partners with management in implementing the fundraising plan.
- 6.7.** Continue to build board capacity in specific areas such as technology, running large organizations, diversity, cultural competency, fundraising, marketing, politics, and finance.
- 6.8.** Broaden the board's concentration, innovation, thinking, and action regarding all board responsibility areas (e.g., enhancing the agency's public standing, monitoring agency interventions and strategies, ensuring adequate financial resources).

### Goal 6 Performance Measures

Below are the performance measures that will be used to assess progress in achieving this strategic goal:

- Board objectives achieved.
- Number and results of collaborations with other homeless youth agencies.
- Results of board self-evaluations show consistent improvement in board performance and level of satisfaction.
- Number of board member donations and participation in fundraising.
- Number, and retention, of new board members.

# Implementing the Plan

*The YouthLink Strategic Plan, 2011–2014: Toward a Seamless Approach to Homeless Youth Service Delivery* will be implemented by staff teams with input from supervisors and directors and oversight from YouthLink’s Executive Director. Teams and individuals will align individual program and service plans with the organization-wide strategic plan. Teams will include existing staff who already work together and new teams that will be established expressly to address new focus areas and goals in YouthLink’s strategic plan.

Some of the teams will be program- and service-based, including those already responsible for developing and implementing their individual program and service plans and working with the Youth Opportunity Center. Other teams will be organization-wide, including those that call upon different collaborative partners.



Budget priorities identified in the strategic planning process will begin to be realized in the actual program and service budget priorities. Programs will align their annual operating plans and budget submissions with the plan, and executive staff will devote time each quarter to review implementation progress.

The implementation strategies require the focus and attention of executive staff and all employees involved in the implementation. Two key actions will set the framework for implementation of the strategic plan:

- Establishment of an implementation group and structure, including forming action teams to develop program and service action plans for addressing each high-priority issue.
- Communicating the plan, including preparing and delivering presentations and written summaries appropriate to the needs of a wide range of audiences.

## Progress Measures

YouthLink will prepare an annual report for the board of directors summarizing progress in achieving the strategic goals and objectives. Doing so will ensure that this plan is not set aside and forgotten in the rush of day-to-day activities or as issues emerge over time.

# Acknowledgements

Completion of the YouthLink Strategic Plan for 2011-2014 would have not been possible without the support of local stakeholders and the work of the YouthLink's Board of Directors and our outstanding team of dedicated staff. We are very grateful for their contributions to the plan, and for their ongoing support. We are especially grateful to the hundreds of individuals, foundations, corporations, companies, local government agencies, consultants, and other organizations that have supported YouthLink over the years.

## Key Stakeholder Interviewees

### Stephanie Able

*Director*  
Healthcare for the Homeless Project

### Cathy ten Broeke

*City/County Coordinator*  
Office to End Homelessness

### Heidi Carlson, PHRN

*Clinic Liaison*  
Youth Opportunity Center

### Nancy Cusack

*Clinical Director*  
The Bridge

### Gail Dorfman

*Commissioner*  
Hennepin County

### Adam Fairbanks

*Community Health Educator*  
Hennepin County

### Lisa Goodman

*Council Chair*  
City of Minneapolis

### David Nelson

*Executive Director*  
Carlson Family Foundation,  
Carlson Companies

### Monica Nilsson

*Director*  
Street Outreach & Community Education,  
St. Stephen's Human Services

### Judy Paul

*Homeless Youth Systems Coordinator*  
Hennepin County

### Curt Peterson

*Project Coordinator*  
Non-Profit Organization Management Industry,  
McKnight Foundation

### Peter Rosenblatt

*Executive Director*  
The Link

### Don Samuels

*Council Member*  
City of Minneapolis

### Patrick Troska

*Executive Director*  
Phillips Family Foundation of Minnesota

### Joanne G. Walz

*Community Philanthropy Officer*  
Minneapolis Foundation

### Rich Wayman

*Executive Director*  
Hearth Connection

### Patricia Wilder

*Executive Vice President*  
Program Operations,  
Catholic Charities

## Strategic Planning Committee:

### Board of Directors

#### Carolyn Chase

*Board Chair*  
*Assistant Dean of Operations*  
Carlson School of Management

#### Bruce Nerland

*Secretary*  
*Senior Vice President*  
Morgan Stanley/Smith Barney

#### Pat Wamser

*Treasurer*  
*CEO*  
Wamser Associates

#### Gail Dorfman

*Commissioner*  
Hennepin County

#### Charlitta Ellis

*Program Director*  
High School for Recording Arts

#### Stefanie Galey

*Partner*  
Faegre & Benson LLP

#### Janeè Harteau

*Deputy Chief*  
Minneapolis Police Department

#### Ben Reinhardt

*Partner*  
KPMG

### Will Roach

*Business Development Director*  
Baker Tilly Virchow Krause

### Jill Sando

*Vice President*  
Products,  
Target Corporation

## Staff

### Heather Huseby, Ed.D.

*Executive Director*

### Bob Nelson

*Program Operation Manager*

### Josephine Pufpaff

*Program Development, Outcome, and Evaluation*

### Frances Roen

*Development Director*

### Liz Lansing

*Executive Administrator, Human Resources*

## Strategic Planning Consultants

### GrayHall LLP

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Thank you for taking the time to review our strategic plan. We hope that the information contained in these pages was useful. For more information, or to provide feedback, please visit our website at [www.youthlinkmn.org](http://www.youthlinkmn.org) or call us at 612.252.1200.

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**The YouthLink Board of Directors and Staff**