



A Community Assessment
& Resource Center

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History of *The Link*, A Community Assessment and Resource Center Serving the 17th Judicial District of Adams and Broomfield Counties

In early 1999, the then Adams County District Attorney's Office and the North Metro Youth Diversion Board recruited representatives of the Adams County community concerned with and involved in juvenile justice issues, to serve on a new Juvenile Crime Enforcement Coalition (JCEC). These JCEC members, numbering 39, were chosen from law enforcement, schools and existing groups that focused on youth, as well as from the community at large.

Both the 17th Judicial District Attorney's Office and the North Metro Youth Diversion Board had previously explored and identified a need for a Juvenile Assessment Center. At the Coalition's first meeting, on March 9th, 1999, 17th Judicial District Attorney Robert S. Grant was elected Chairperson, and the JCEC endorsed using JAIBG grant funds to create a Juvenile Assessment Center, that would address the majority of ideas and concerns expressed. After commitments from participants to contribute the required 10% cash match, the Advisory Committee, led by Assistant DA, and primary proposal author, Heather Turner, met on March 26th to complete the JAIBG grant proposal. At its next meeting on April 2nd, the JCEC approved the joint plan to establish a Juvenile Assessment Center to serve Adams County, and using JAIBG program funds, *The Link* opened its doors with record speed six months later on October 4th, 1999.

After eight months of operation, the effectiveness and potential of *The Link* were clearly demonstrated, and at its June, 2000 meeting the JCEC approved a joint plan to continue operating *The Link* and to expand and formalize new services, comprised of municipal probation services to youth and, via contract for services, referrals from school districts for suspended and expelled youth, as well as detention-screening services through the Senate Bill 94 Program.

Early in 2004, the JCEC had approved an application to the IRS for tax-exempt 501(c) (3) status, and in October *The Link* began operation as an independent non-profit agency with the hope of expanded grant and foundation funding opportunities.

Near the end of 2005 with federal JAIBG grand funds decreasing and long-time Executive Director Zenia Tata departed. Under new Executive Director, Dr. Annie Alexander, it became clear funding was becoming critical and a major effort to negotiate an IGA for sustaining *The Link* into the future. In April 2006, *The Link* won a five year, annually renewable contract for SB94 detention screening and assessment services, and in June Adams County Human Services awarded *The Link* a contract for to provide services to support reunification efforts and prevent youth from entering the human service system.

In October, new Executive Director Valorie Ladwig took the helm and in late 2006 an IGA with 6 municipalities and the Adams Co. Sheriff's office for countywide support was approved, funding *The Link's* services through 2007. The IGA has been renewed every year thereafter representing local law enforcement, municipal and county government's commitment to the services provided by *The Link*.

Under the leadership of the new director, *The Link* expanded programs to offer case management to youth transported to the agency by law enforcement and restructured the alternative to expulsion program to a cognitive behavior model. In 2008, a work group was created to discuss a way to open a combined assessment center and shelter for Adams County youth. Within 18 months and through a partnership with Shiloh Homes a building was purchased and renovated with space to also include a therapeutic residential program, as well as collocating SB-94 and PATHS staff. The combined assessment center and shelter, The Sanctuary, opened in June 2010. The Link was able to return to 24/7 staffing with an on-call system for overnight and Sundays.

In 2009 the JCEC endorsed *The Link's* partnership with Adams County Youth Initiative/Safe Schools Healthy Students collaboration to provide seed money to develop an early gang intervention program called ENGAGE (Empowering Neighborhoods with Gang Awareness and Gang Education). *The Link* also collaborated with a truancy court initiative in 2010 to provide assessment and case management services to truant youth. The program receives funding from the 1451 Collaboration and school referrals for services. In April 2011 *The Link* was once again awarded the SB94 5 year

RFP to provided detention screening in the 17th Judicial District. In the fall of 2010 expanded services to include a drug and alcohol group, gender specific anger management groups, as well as Improving Family Dynamics and Girl's Circle and Boy's Council.

Recognizing the need for accurate data, the JCEC supported the development of a new records management system for *The Link*. The CARE data base became operational in December 2011. The data base was built with the ability to expand to an index or information sharing system for future needs. The agency currently has an MOU for information sharing with Youth and Family Connections in Weld County. For the first time in the agency's history a logo for marketing and branding purposes was created by the executive director.

The plan defining *The Link* was developed through a broad-based, multidisciplinary community process that directly involved 39 representatives and incorporated experience from nearby Juvenile Assessment Centers in its design. It specifies key characteristics of *The Link* as:

- 1) A single point of entry through *The Link* to facilitate access to services both for law enforcement, youth and families.
- 2) A comprehensive assessment process that begins with a family strength-based approach, and evaluates the youth's needs in a wide range of areas, including substance abuse, mental health, education, employment and training and other needs. The assessments will be carried out by on-site Intake Specialists paid through grant funds.
- 3) A comprehensive, integrated computer data system that will meet the information sharing and case management needs of *The Link*, as well as assist in data collection for evaluation of program effectiveness.
- 4) An integrated case management system that will link youth with services and provide ongoing services monitoring that strengthens, but does not duplicate existing case management efforts.

The Link is a single point of entry for assessment and case management for juvenile offenders, at-risk youth, and families.

A *juvenile offender* is defined as a youth who:

- is 10-17 years old (until 18th birthday), and
- has received a municipal citation, or
- has been arrested, or
- has been diverted (pre-filing or post-filing), or
- is on pretrial status, or
- is adjudicated as delinquent.

An *at-risk youth* is one who:

- is 8-17 years old (until 18th birthday), and/or
- is less than 10 years old and has committed a criminal act, and/or
- is truant, and/or is or has a history of runaway(s), and/or
- is out of parent/guardian control (as defined by parent/guardian), and/or
- is homeless without proper care or is not domiciled with a parent, guardian or legal custodian, and/or
- requests assistance.

By offering immediate intervention to juveniles who are beyond the control of their parents, *The Link* significantly impacts the burden placed on county child protection agencies and local law enforcement agencies, both of which are often called to intervene in family situations where the adolescent is beyond the control of their parent, yet poses no imminent danger to self or others. In the past 15 years *The Link* has served 4,486 juveniles who were brought to *The Link* because they were beyond the control of their parents, and 1,574 runaways, who otherwise would have been referred to human services. Therefore, by being the first contact for these 6,060 families and trying to provide them with appropriate referrals and family mediation, the agency is able to lift a significant burden from Adams County Human Services allowing their staff to focus on issues of child neglect and/or abuse. *The Link* transport services have saved law enforcement over 30,000 hours in the past 15 years allowing officers to return to duty as quickly as possible.