

4th Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

Category: ECS#2 Tier 2
Empowering Clients to Self-Sufficiency

Project Title: LINKS Lab

1. **Project/Program Summary:** Briefly summarize the project's history, purpose, timeline and budget.

The LINKS Program was developed in response to the growing need for better preparation of foster children transitioning out of custody into the community. Up until the last few years, foster children were housed and cared for in the foster care system and then discharged from custody at age 18 with little or no preparation to live independently. This often resulted in failure, leading to homelessness and/or criminal behavior. The purpose of the Moore County LINKS Lab is to build a network of relevant services for youth so that they will have ongoing connections with family, friends, mentors, the community, employers, education, financial assistance, skills training, and other resources to facilitate their transition to adulthood. LINKS participants are eligible for services from age 13 to 21. Each participant is given a designated amount of financial assistance to prepare them to transition to adulthood. This amount is predetermined by the state of NC and the legislators.

2. **Innovation:** Why is the program unique? How does your project differ from similar projects?

Moore County DSS utilizes community resources to help youth/young adults reach their potential to be self sufficient when they reach the age of majority. Training on sexually transmitted diseases has been provided by a local Women's Health Center, on maintaining good credit and purchasing cars by Pinehurst Mitsubishi, and on how to apply and maintain employment by Achievers (a local agency that partners with the LINKS worker). Moore County DSS takes the program one step further in their LINKS Lab with a washer & dryer to teach young adults how to do their laundry and a computer lab to research academic studies as well as conduct a job search. Participants in the LINKS program also develop culinary skills at the local NC Cooperative Extension office.

3. **Project Success and Impact:** What were the objectives? How well were they met? How widespread is the impact of the project/program? What is the anticipated long-term impact? Did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, businesses, etc.? Describe the outcome of the collaboration.

The objective of the program is to teach youth and young adults how to become self sufficient and to reach their fullest potential. As a result of participating in the LINKS program, several young adults have completed college. Currently there are three LINKS participants in the NC University System and two in community college. One youth is in the military. LINKS collaborates with several agencies, programs and businesses in the community in an effort to provided needed services for youth. Some of these agencies are the Work Investment Program operated through the Moore County Schools, Communities in Schools, Sandhills Community Action Program for housing, Sandhills Community College, local banks, etc. The anticipated long-term

impact is that LINKS Lab participants will not have to depend on the welfare system and will be able to successfully provide for themselves and their families. They will learn how to make good choices in every day decision making. The agency will have “taught them to fish” and not just given them the fish to eat.

4. **Project Effort and Difficulty:** How well did the program use limited resources? What obstacles or challenges did you overcome? How was this done?

The LINKS worker has made good use of available community resources as evidenced by the successful outcomes for several youth who have turned 18. In addition, the worker has developed tools within the agency for youth to use to advance in the LINKS program. If there were resources that were not available through the program, private donors and businesses were contacted for assistance. The main challenges were job resources and transportation for LINKS participants.

5. **Ability to Replicate Project:** Can this project be duplicated in other counties? What could counties do to minimize obstacles and problems?

This project can be duplicated in other counties. To minimize obstacles, collaborate with as many agencies and private individuals as possible to make your project a success.