

**County** Wake County Human Services  
**Department of Social Services**

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**Project Title** Wake County LINKS, Collaborating to Improve the Lives of Youth in Foster Care

**Category** Profiles in Community Collaboration  
(Please select one)

### Project Description and Summary

**What did you do?**

**Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?**

Profiles In Community Collaboration

**LINKS: THE NORTH CAROLINA FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM**  
The name of the North Carolina program, NC LINKS, is not an acronym, and therefore doesn't "stand" for anything. Instead, it is a word that captures the purposes of the Chafee Act and the intent of North Carolina:

to build a network of relevant services with 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. We have a unique model within our county that has allotted for very successful outcomes by fostering community collaboration with various agencies to support our youth. We have increased our graduation numbers since 2013 to 2107.

#### High School Graduates

##### Year # of Grads

2013 8

2014 19

2015 30

2016 31

2017 32

Our unique model encompasses agencies that provide the following support services

- ⌘ Life Skills Assessments
- ⌘ Transitional Living planning
- ⌘ Life Skills Groups
- ⌘ Internship Programs
- ⌘ Housing Support/Referrals
- ⌘ Tutoring
- ⌘ Financial Support
- ⌘ Youth Advisory Council
- ⌘ Annual Credit Checks
- ⌘ Mentoring

With the collaboration of community partners, the service provisions have been increased to support the youths' overall and individual planning needs.

Youth of all eligible ages receive needed educational advocacy and supports to ensure optimal success in their programming. As such, there is a more intensive model applied for Juniors and Seniors to provide additional assessment, tutoring, referral and school meetings to ensure

that all needed service areas are being addressed to support graduation. This also includes exposure and training for college and career planning [to include: college tours, financial aid assistance/completion, job readiness training and internships and individual guidance on course planning for college enrollment.

### **Project Success and Impact**

**What was the outcome?**

**Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?**

Timeline for services through the LINKS program initiates at the onset of their involvement with Child Welfare. At this time, the program is charged with working with all eligible youth on personal life goals to aid in their individual success and ability to be self-sufficient while continuing to work on a permanency goal.

At any given time there are over 200 youth eligible to receive support through LINKS. As such, it is even more challenging to serve all youth with the limited amount of internal resources. Assessing this challenge and understanding that the need to continue to provide the service remained critical, there was a need to build a community partnership that would support youth outcomes and provide ongoing services in the community.

Annual budget has ranged from \$30,000 to over 100,000 as the numbers of youth aged 13 to 21 increased over the years and youth accessing services has risen. Having the amount of financial resources will forever be a challenge to overcome, but managing the funds effectively has been a critically important task to maintain. Ensuring that youth has access to the financial resources when needed is necessary to help support their programming and success.

### Successes with Collaboration:

- ⊗ Maximizing staffing with overall limited resources
- ⊗ Maximizing agency resources to support youth or programming
- ⊗ Increased utilization in services by youth [able to access more with larger pool of supports
- ⊗ Having community partners providing support services reduces anxiety around accessing services and increases longevity chances for successful completion.
- ⊗ Increased knowledge of programs in the community and accessibility to support youth.
- ⊗ Maximizing Funding to support youth in various areas of need to support success.

### The Implementation Public Health Approach: Foster Care, STDs and Pregnancy Prevention Integration

Public Health HIV/STD Community Program partnered with Child Welfare's LINKS Program to implement the adapted version of Making Proud Choices! for foster care youth. Leveraging on the LINKS' expertise of the foster care system and awareness of the unique needs of youth in out-of-home care and the experience of public Health Educators implementing HIV/STD prevention programs on Sexual Health, Reproductive Health, Decision-making skills and Healthy relationships strengthened the implementation of the adapted MPC curriculum.

On January 2013, Human Services began to implement the curriculum Making Proud Choices for Youth in Out-of-Home Care. Making Proud Choices for Youth in Out-of-Home Care is a ten-module evidence-based curriculum that provides adolescents with the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to reduce their risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV, and pregnancy. In addition to addressing the consequences of sexually transmitted infections, teen pregnancy, communication, condom use, refusal skills, and strategies for prevention, the modules of the curriculum have been revised to address sexuality and relationships with social workers, medical providers, care givers and sexual partners. The curriculum is based on three theories; the social cognitive theory, the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior. In addition to promote the importance of protecting one's community and

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family ; Sexual Responsibility and Accountability, and Role of Pride as major themes; the new adaptation for in out-of- home care youth incorporates 2 additional themes that are intended to address the needs that are unique to foster care youth. The two additional themes are 1) Role of Healthy Relationships to help youth distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships, an issue of particular importance to youth in care because they are hungry for love and understand how being in a healthy relationship facilitates the successful negotiation of safer-sex behaviors 2) Strength-Based Approach to help youth in care that have experienced past trauma and a lack of consistent loving/supportive relationships. For many, their inner strength and resilience have allowed them to survive these tough challenges. The curriculum has separate activities designed for younger youth age 12-14 and older adolescents age 15-18 and participants from both age groups are recruited to attend the class. The recruitment is basically done by Child Welfare Division Adolescent Social Work Team.

The County had six facilitators trained to offer Making Proud Choices for Youth in Out-of-Home Care. The facilitators representing three government agencies such as Human Services' Public Health and Child Welfare Divisions and North Carolina Cooperative Extension's 4-H Youth Development. Facilitators from youth community-based organizations such as Strengthening the Black Family, Inc. and My Goal, Our Mission, Inc. were also trained. Facilitators need to have experienced working with youth and knowledge on HIV/STDs to be able to teach subjects covered in the curriculum Making Proud Choices!

As of November 2014, fifty-three youth have completed the Making Proud Choices for Youth in Out-of-Home Care curriculum. During the implementation of the curriculum, the facilitators faced some challenges with recruitment, transportation, and staffing. To address the recruitment and transportation challenges, additional efforts and collaboration went to engage staff from existing adolescent programs to assist the implementation coordinator to recruit youth from their programs located in Human Services Building where the Child Welfare Division is sited. The additional transportation also was address by holding the MPC classes in the Building, the same location where the youth go for services. Finding

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facilitators to teach the curriculum continues to be an issue because of the increase of children in County care and reduction in staffing. To address the shortness of facilitators and increased the pool of trained new facilitators, two staff were selected to become Making Proud Choices for Youth in Out-of-Home Care Train-the-Trainers to be able to locally train new facilitators. After they complete the Train-the-Trainer course at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy Headquarters in Washington, DC, additional staff they will be able to teach the curriculum to youth in out-of-home care in the County.

#### Key Findings:

The finding can be broken down in two main categories, one youth sexual behavior and the great collaboration among the HIV/STD Community Program, LINKS, 4 H Youth Program and two community partners; Strengthening the Black Family and Our Mission.

#### Youth Findings

- Contraceptive use among foster youth participating on LINKS has improved. Participants are asking for contraceptives on a regular basis.
- Increased in the number of youth in the LINKS program asking for contraceptives and also taking more on a regular basis.
- No pregnancies have been reported from any youth that participated in the program.
- Increased in the number of youth in the LINKS Program asking for condoms and taking them more consistently.

#### Collaboration

- The effective collaboration between the facilitators from the HS HIV/STD Community Program, Child Welfare –LINKS and 4H Public Health, as well as both community agencies partners; Strengthening the Black Family and Our Mission; made the intervention seamless to the youth participants.
  - Partnerships were enhanced and community partners were able to be trained on how to deliver evidence based curriculum acquiring new skills and experience that they can take with them to their respective agencies.
  - The partnership and collaboration of the HIV/STD Community Program, LINKS and 4-H Public Health Team strengthened the implementation of
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MPC and allowed the sustainability of the program. Making Proud Choices now one of the LINKS regular programs to the youth in out-of-home care.

- The Collaboration between the HIV/STD Community Program, LINKS and 4H still stronger and thriving.

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