

Iowa Legal Aid's Youth Link Projects

What are Youth Link Projects?

Iowa Legal Aid's Youth Link Projects focus on serving at-risk youth through collaborations with school officials, the Department of Human Services and child protective services providers.

Who do they serve?

The Youth Link Project's primary target population is young people who are:

- Age 21 and under, with an emphasis on young people ages 16 to 21, who are currently in foster care or Department of Human Services-sponsored Aftercare programs; and
- Young people ages 16 to 21 who are considered to be at-risk youth who may be homeless, near-homeless and/or living in unstable housing arrangements.

What are the goals?

- Improve the lives of at-risk youth through legal education and legal representation that will address current legal needs and prevent future legal entanglements.
- Provide young people preparing to enter adulthood, or who have recently entered adulthood, with access to legal information and resources to give them the knowledge and confidence to make positive choices that will lead to safe, stable and productive futures.

How are these goals achieved?

By presenting legal issues in ways that are innovative, engaging and understandable, young people will gain a better understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities as well as gain a better understanding of how the law can help to appropriately resolve future problems or access necessities of life. Topics include:

- Renting an apartment and understanding rights and responsibilities under Iowa's landlord/tenant laws;
- Buying a used car and signing legally binding contracts;
- Sealing Juvenile Court Records;
- Losing your job and other employment-related issues;
- Establishing healthy relationships and addressing domestic violence;
- Effective parenting and custodial issues;
- Establishing credit and addressing unfair debt collection practices;
- Emancipation;
- Immigration system and laws;
- Understanding Iowa's legal system.

By accessing Youth Link services to resolve legal issues, young people and families will avoid homelessness, bring safety and stability into their lives, and take significant steps toward breaking the cycle of poverty.

What have been the results and how are results measured?

In 2015/2016 there were two operating Youth Link Projects: in Council Bluffs and Polk County.

In its third year of operation, the project in Council Bluffs provided services to 377 young people. In its first year of operation, the Polk County project served 223 young people.

Services provided under these projects include, but are not limited to:

- In-person legal assessments or “Legal Health Checks” with homeless or near homeless youth and young people preparing to age out of foster care that are designed to address legal issues young people currently face, or could face, once they are living on their own;
- Tailored legal education presentations to high school, middle school and elementary students, including seminars, mock trials, and other innovative activities such as the “Adult Decision Making 101” legal decision-making and financial literacy live simulation; and
- Extended legal representation provided to young people and their families who are preparing to exit a Child In Need of Assistance (CINA) action or are undergoing voluntary services from the Iowa Department of Human Services to avoid a CINA action.

All Youth Link outcomes are measured using Iowa Legal Aid’s PIKA case management system and also through quarterly and annual reports that are provided to grantors.

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