



# Employability Access Plaza

(Safety / ADA Improvements)

A proposal to:

*Transportation, Infrastructure  
and Capitals (TIC)  
Appropriations Subcommittee*

# *What Is Link Associates?*

Link Associates is a unique community-based non-profit organization that provides services for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. Since 1953, Link has affected the lives of thousands of individuals and their families by a team of 350 dedicated staff.

Over the years, Link Associates has grown and serves more than 1,200 individuals with Medicaid funding. Though there are other organizations in Des Moines that serve individuals with intellectual disabilities, Link Associates is the only organization that provides a full range of services.

# What Does Link Associates Provide?

Link Associates provides a variety of services tailored to meet an individual's needs. The individuals who choose our services have a variety of needs ranging from job training to 24-hour support. With Link's services, individuals learn to integrate into their community, achieve their goals and become active members of the community. Programs facilitate growth and encourage each person to function at their own level of ability and independence.

## Link's services include:

- Residential
- Employment
- Day Programming
- Case Management
- Respite
- Representative Payee
- Leisure
- Transportation

Link's employment, day program, case management, leisure, and transportation services support individuals from all other local providers, reducing the need for service duplication. Link provides 135,000 Medicaid trips/year at a 1/3 of the cost of public transportation, saving Polk County over a million dollars annually.

# *Opportunity: the Key to Employment*

The largest barrier to obtaining competitive employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities is the lack of direct experience, resulting in few opportunities to obtain employment and low confidence during an interview.

The Federal Medicaid Pre-Vocational program prohibits the teaching of direct skills, leaving participants, who do not generalize well, no direct skills to build a resume or confidence to complete an employment application.

# Opening Doors

To meet this need, Link Associates opened the Link General Store in May 2013. The Link General Store is an employment skills program open to the public, located within Link Associates. It is designed to help prepare an individual for community employment by learning skills needed in a convenience store setting along with hard skills necessary for any employment.

Learning takes place in the Link General Store as well as in a classroom environment within a time limited 16 week competency based program. Individuals are paid minimum wage when working in the store.



*Link General Store Participant Employees*



*Eric Hanson from KCCI reports a feature story on the Link General Store and employment program.*

# Link General Store

This one of a kind program is a first in the nation concept and could significantly change lives, not only in Des Moines, but if expanded, could serve as a nation-wide option.

This project was made possible through the generosity of Casey's General Stores, who designed and built our store, donated the teaching curriculum and allow us to purchase food and supplies through them at cost.



*Casey's President and CEO, Bob Meyers addresses guests at the Link General Store Grand Opening.*



*Senator Tom Harkin visits the Link General Store and endorses the concept.*



# Access: the Key to Progress

- The Link General Store is only accessible from the main entrance of Link Associates.
- There is no community space for visitors, customers and guests to enjoy food and beverages purchased.
- Hallways are congested with adaptive equipment
- An exterior entrance into the Link General Store would improve traffic flow and and increase opportunity to teach skills like order taking, cleaning and serving



# Landscaping & Infrastructure

The building was vacant for four years before Link's relocation. The 35-year old pond, which is required for storm water management, is quite large and covers an area to the south and it is adjacent to the walkway leading to the main entrance. Currently, the pond is in poor condition. With years of sediment and debris collecting in the pond, water clarity is quite poor and has an unpleasant odor. The liner is old, worn out and shrinking. Additionally, the lack of plantings around the pond make it a magnet for an overabundance of geese that are dirty and can be aggressive. Erosion damage to the sidewalk closest to the building make it unsafe for individuals with balance and mobility issues. As the soil washes away, instability and eventual collapse of the sidewalk will result.

Existing Site Photos: South Side Entrance



# Landscaping & Infrastructure

The pond is a focal point for the building and has the potential to help us attract additional customers to the Link General Store. The store is within Link Associates and though neighboring businesses can purchase from the store, our internal halls are congested with staff and persons served making access difficult. With the addition of an exterior door, public access will be greatly improved. This will provide greater customer service skills for the individuals participating in this training program. This project will also transform our outdoor space into a beautiful place of enjoyment where Link individuals and the public can relax with friends and spend quality time outdoors.



Existing Site Photos: North-West Side of Walk and Pond



# Employability Access Plaza



Plan: Employability Access Plaza / Walk

CONFLUENCE

# Employability Access Plaza



# Employability Access Plaza



# Project Outcomes:

*Employability • Accessibility • Safety • Integration*

The Employability Access Plaza will:

- Make the entire plaza ADA accessible with safe, handicapped accessible walk way and entrance
- Create a retaining wall and backfill to prevent erosion around the pond
- Provide additional training opportunities for those served to prepare for job opportunities in order taking, serving, cleaning and customer service
- Provide reverse integration opportunities for the community including neighboring businesses. The public will be able to shop, eat, relax and engage with those served in a positive manner
- Provide a coffee/lunch patio overlooking the pond



*(Senator Tom Harkin, Linda Dunshee and Dr. Michael Gamel-McCormick, Senior Council & Disability Policy Director evaluating ways the Employability Access Plaza could open doors for Iowans.)*

# Budget

	Cost
○ Create new exterior entry and exterior seating for the Link General Store	\$40,000
○ Replace pond liner and repair edges (required for storm water management)	\$175,000
○ Build new walls along building to correct erosion problems	\$70,000
○ Replace/enhance side walks, safety rail, update landscaping and site amenities	<u>\$165,000</u>
	\$450,000

## Our Mission

Providing people with intellectual disabilities opportunities to achieve their personal goals

## Our Vision

Link Associates will be the recognized leader in providing quality services to persons with intellectual disabilities

## Our Values

Dignity and Respect  
Quality Services  
Caring Environments  
Personal Choice  
Long Term Commitment





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