

MID-YEAR REPORT FOR OUTCOME PROGRESS

Reporting for: July 1 – November 30 of the current year!

Agency Name: LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF STORY COUNTY

Program Name: Legal Aid – Civil 2.2c

Brief Description of Program:

The Legal Aid Society of Story County has one program: legal representation for low-income residents of Story County in civil matters. We measure success by analyzing our case outcomes and by ensuring that our services provide meaningful improvement in our clients' lives. We focus on client SAFETY, SECURITY, and STABILITY. When our clients are safer (physically and in terms of their mental health), more secure (in terms of finances, housing, and access to services), and on their way to personal and family stability, we have succeeded.

1. **Program/ Service Outcome (Change/ Benefit to Clients/ Community) – please refer back to the corresponding ABF 5(O) and provide an update on program/ service outcome from July 1 to date:**

Our services make clients' lives safer, more stable, and more secure. While 100% of the clients responding to the evaluation indicate Legal Aid has helped to improve their lives, specific benefits as applicable include financial security (76%), physical safety (81%), and increased safety for their children (62% - the other 38% indicate this measure does not apply). 95.5% of respondents state they were able to make informed decisions and 82% had an increased knowledge of the Iowa legal system and laws. 95.2% of reporting clients indicated that Legal Aid staff treated them with respect. All reporting clients (100%) indicated that Legal Aid staff listened to them, answered their questions and were responsive. All would recommend Legal Aid to others.

2. **Measurement Used (How Often, Tools Used) – please refer back to the corresponding ABF 5(O) and provide an update on measurement used from July 1 to date:**

1. Method of resolution (trial, mediation or settlement)
2. Client evaluations (exit surveys) of their Legal Aid service. We continue to use online evaluations to enable us to connect with the client electronically and simplify data collection and reporting. We maintain hardcopies available for clients as needed.

3. Attorney evaluations of the case when each file is closed; this has also moved to an online form to simplify and streamline the collection process.
4. Statistics (ongoing analysis of case numbers, demographics, attorney hours, etc.) with increased ability to make use of the data contained in the database.

3. Measurement Update (Please provide update on measurement data collected based on the ABF 5(O) from July 1 to date):

As with many so many agencies, last year's final numbers were affected by the global pandemic. Following the guidance of the CDC, IDPH and the Iowa Supreme Court, with the exception of emergent needs, starting in mid-March, the office closed to walk-in traffic and very few new cases were opened for an extended period of time. Every effort was made to meet deadlines and emergent need cases were still accepted. During this time new protocols were also enacted, including the installation of physical barriers in the office, the move to virtual meetings with clients whenever possible, and enabling electronic signature capabilities. By July 1, the office was gradually working towards regular caseloads. This is reflected in the numbers of cases in the office – climbing from 4 new cases in July to 10 in October. We have opened 31 new cases this year, a little over half of what would be expected in a typical year.

The office has focused on and continued to meet and exceed expectations with open cases during these slower months. 53 cases have been completed by November 30, 2020, up slightly from 49 in the previous year. All together the attorneys have worked or are working on 113 unique cases since July 1, 2020.

In these 113 matters, 169 children have been affected, 62 cases involve people with self-identified mental illness or physical disabilities.

Our three attorneys have logged a total of 2248.50 hours, 1438.07 of them billable in direct contact with clients in the 113 cases as of November 30, 2020. This translates into 41.36% of the hours allotted by the City of Ames, 59.93% of Story County, 100% of Local Option, and 88.05% of ISU-Student Government.

While CICS is no longer part of ASSET, it is important to report these numbers to provide a more complete picture. With the new CICS approved cases restrictions, we have seen a decrease of 55.55% in funded hours compared to this time last year. And hours funded are at very significantly lower rate – 32.9% lower. To date, we have billed 28.20% of the hours required to meet the annual budgeted numbers.

4. Outcomes Achieved (Result to Clients/ Community) – please refer back to the corresponding ABF 5(O) and provide an update on the outcomes achieved from July 1 to date:

Legal Aid has assisted in 113 matters since July 1. 53 of them have been completed. 60 remain open. These matters include:

Family Law (custody, visitation, child support): 28.32%
Divorce: 24.78%
Guardianship: 14.16%
Other (will, POA, unemployment, name change, misc.): 7.96%
Social Security Appeal: 7.96%
Landlord/Tenant issue: 4.42%
Debtor/Creditor: 5.31%
Protective Orders: 7.08%

5. **Barriers Encountered (please refer back to the corresponding ABF 5(O) and provide an update on the barriers encountered from July 1 to date):**

1. The biggest barriers encountered this year center around COVID. This wide-reaching pandemic's effects are twofold. It has stunted our ability to meet with clients in person and caused the courts to postpone hearings, delay deadlines or move hearings to alternate mediums.
2. In person contact came to an abrupt halt on March 18. The office closed to walk-in traffic and remains so. Intake forms are available online, can be mailed directly to an individual and are located outside the door for client use. Appointments are being scheduled virtually whenever possible and software is being used to collect electronic signatures on documents. While these technological advances embrace social distancing and reduce public health risks during the pandemic, there remain numerous people who do not have access to reliable internet, struggle with technology or things get lost in translation. The office is committed to meet clients where they are and work diligently to collect information electronically prior to online meetings – often requiring extra attention and follow up. Clients without internet access are accommodated with in person paperwork and either a telephone conference or in-person meeting as needed. On the positive side, for many clients, the ability to participate in their attorney meetings virtually has increased their access to our services as it has removed the transportation issues that we have so often reported to ASSET as a significant barrier to our services. We intend to continue to offer virtual and telephone appointments when appropriate after the pandemic is over.
3. The closure of the courts as mandated by the Supreme Court of Iowa have resulted in a significant backlog of hearings and trials. In addition, most hearings and trials that have been conducted have been accomplished by web conferencing or telephone, which have the same barriers for some clients as with meeting with us virtually or by telephone. It is not uncommon for a client to participate in a hearing or trial in their car for privacy and noise reduction, for example. We are creative with clients who do not have good access to telephone or internet to ensure that they are able to meaningfully and fully participate in their hearing or trial, even if the hearing cannot be accomplished in person. In addition, we have seen an uptick in inquiries from both tenants and with

other local social service providers regarding eviction actions as the various proclamations by the Governor, stays issued by the Iowa Supreme Court, and moratoriums issued by the CDC have been confusing to tenants who are unable to maintain their rent payments. We have strived to keep up to date on all government actions related to the pandemic that may affect the population we serve.

6. **Clients Served (please refer back to the corresponding ABF 5 Service Statistics and provide an update on number of clients served from July 1 to date):**

Our attorneys have assisted 113 families since July 1. 169 children have been affected in these cases. 62 cases involve people with mental illness or physical disabilities. 15 of these cases were or are currently approved for funding through CICS. This constitutes 25.86% of the 58 individuals self-identified themselves as having a mental illness. 5 cases were filed for ISU students this year compared to 10 last year at this time. This highlights the sporadic nature of our work on behalf of ISU students.

Geographically, the majority of our clients are residents of Ames, making up 51.8% of the total caseload. Nevada residents account for 23.2% of all clients and the remainder are from other parts of Story County. All clients are from Story County.

The income eligibility threshold was extended to 150% of the Federal Poverty Line in April 2018 and has been monitored since then. Legal Aid continues to provide services to additional residents without compromising the accessibility to lower income levels. Currently 76.99% of clients are at or below 100% of the FPL, 11.5% of clients are between 100-125% of the FPL and 11.5% of clients are between 125-150% of the FPL. The Volunteer Lawyer Project eligibility remains at 175% of the FPL.

Clients continue to overwhelmingly be women, 80.53% compared to 19.47% men.

Nine of the new cases since July 1, 2020 were crisis cases. Crisis being defined as having a deadline such as a Hearing or Response ordered by the Court.

7. **Have you had to turn any clients away that desire to participate in this program? If so, why? If so, how many? If so, when?**

No clients have been turned away except in cases of conflict of interest or ineligibility under our guidelines. In rare instances we have turned away individuals with out of state cases and counties that do not border Story. We are not licensed to practice in other states and we do not have the resources to travel extensively for cases.

Those we have turned away from direct assistance in our office were considered for placement with a volunteer attorney in Story County through the Volunteer Lawyer Project (VLP). The VLP extends access to justice to additional residents with an expanded cut-off at 175% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Conflicts referred to the Story County VLP were processed through the Polk County VLP office.

In FY 2019-2020, 12 applicants were referred on to the VLP; 5 of these were placed with a volunteer attorney in Story County, 7 were not placed. Of these 12, 9 referrals were between 150-175% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and 3 were direct conflicts to our office.

This referral program offers another option for low income Story County residents to access legal representation for their civil cases. Instead of giving the resident a list of attorneys to contact, we actively attempt to place qualifying residents with an attorney that have signed up with us to work with these individuals at no cost. The program is unable to consider crisis cases for placement. The program cannot guarantee placement and time is of the essence for clients needing immediate legal counsel.



December 14, 2020

Submitted by

Date

Staff Use Only:

Change/ Benefits demonstrated for client/ community?	Yes	No
Quantifiable Outcome Measures?	Yes	No
Outcomes Reported?	Yes	No