

## **FY18 Legal Aid Liaison Report**

**Craig Ogilvie, Nov 2016**

### **Need:**

- The Legal Aid Society of Story County is led by the executive director Carin Forbes; two attorneys to serve clients who are at under 125% of poverty level within Story County.
- Most of the cases are family law cases, but some in disability appeals.
- The waitlist is typically on the order of 30 cases, although time sensitive cases don't get put on the waiting list.

### **Strength of Program**

The program is well managed, and effectively serves a critical need for clients in Story County. The office is staffed with an office manager: a role that helps the lawyers focus their time on legal issues. The director has started several initiatives, including a Volunteer Lawyer Project (VLP) where prospective clients who are between 125 and 150% of poverty level are referred to county lawyers for them to possibly take the case pro bono. The board is very active and engaged and some fundraising is taking place.

### **Weakness of Program**

- The VLP program is still in its early stage with some communication/expectation concerns, e.g. that the referred lawyer does not have to take the case.
- Attorney turnover is an ongoing concern.

### **General Assessment**

- With two lawyers on staff it may be hard to bill down available funds, hence there is the chance that some money will be left on the table.
- At the same stage, the new Central Iowa Community Services (CIC) has reduced the type of services that Legal Aid can provide to clients which has led to a significant reduction in the Legal Aid request for Mental Health dollars over the past two years – from \$43K to \$10K last year. Due to CIC restrictions even those FY17 allocated Mental Health dollars may not be spent down.
- The agency is in a good fiscal position with low rent and a healthy financial reserve.

### **Future Outlook**

- It seems important to discuss and resolve the restriction that CIC has placed on legal mental health services. It was beyond this volunteer's understanding. The county does have financial resources available in its mental health allocation, it is a priority of the county, and it seems there are unmet client needs.
- Legal aid is thinking about where to be located. There are benefits to being in Nevada, next to courts, affordable rent, but the director is concerned about ease of access for clients from Ames.