

## ACCESS Liaison Report

Liaisons: Jennifer Schill,

**1. Need for Program. Describe who the target population is and whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing. Indicate the source of this information. Also, indicate how the program/service is different and how it is similar to others and what would happen if the program/service ceased to exist. List the priorities established by ASSET Funders, which the programming addresses. The mission of ACCESS is to address the roots and impact of domestic and sexual violence through services that enhance safety, empower survivors, and promote understanding and social justice within our community. The mission of ACCESS is to address the roots and impact of domestic and sexual violence through services that enhance safety, empower survivors, and promote understanding and social justice within our community.**

All services provided by ACCESS are free and confidential.

- 24-hour Crisis Lines: Listening, support, information and advocacy
- Housing: Safe, temporary emergency sheltering and housing for victims and their children.
- Children's Programs: Counseling, advocacy, outings, and play groups.
- Individual Counseling: Short-term counseling to adult survivors of child sexual abuse, sexual assault, or domestic violence or dating violence.
- Support Groups: Support groups for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and children who have experienced or witnessed family violence.
- Advocacy: Support, information and referrals for clients working with the legal, medical, or social service systems.
- Community Education: Educational programming to schools, community groups, organizations and agencies.
- Crisis Response Services
- SART (Story County Sexual Assault Response Team): Crisis support and on-going advocacy.
- Homicide and Violent Crimes support

Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 515-292-5378 or Toll Free 800-203-3488

Domestic Abuse Crisis Line: 515-292-0519 or Toll Free 855-983-4641

Housing/Sheltering Crisis Line: 515-292-0543 or Toll Free 855-696-2980

ACCESS is one of the few entities to provide both shelter (housing) and emergency services for sexual and domestic assault. They meet the funder's requirements for crisis intervention, assistance to low and moderate income families, safety, health, and well-being to children and adults, and programs and services that promote personal safety with regards to violence and substance abuse, both in Ames and Story County.

**As part of their sexual assault services**, ACCESS provides FREE and CONFIDENTIAL support to victims of sexual violence. ACCESS understands that an experience of sexual violence is highly personal.

Therefore, any victim may want to take time considering all options for service, and make the choices that best meet her/his comfort level.

- Our 24-hour crisis line 1-800-203-3488; for a victim, friend, family or support to reach an advocate to discuss safety and support needs.
- Response: In-person, 24/7 response to victim in need, such as when reporting sexual violence to law enforcement or a medical provider, or to another location where a victim is seeking help.
- Criminal Justice Advocacy: support to a victim as she/he reports a crime, or is involved in later proceedings relating to the crime such as meetings with attorneys or court hearings.
- Systems Advocacy: assistance to a victim in seeking help from, or explaining needs to systems such as a workplace, to a medical or counseling provider, or to a school/ university.
- Community education and training; to help all community members engage in the fight against sexual violence and to enhance community members and professional's skills to increase protections for victims.

#### Sexual Abuse Counseling:

An advocate can provide counseling to assist a survivor of sexual violence in recognizing the impact of abuse, to identify the strength that she/he had in surviving this abuse, and to recognize resources that can be utilized for long term healing. We strive to increase a survivor's own capacity to heal in whatever way she/he feels is most beneficial. Whenever possible, ACCESS strives to connect a survivor to a long-term specialized resource such as a counselor or therapist. In addition, we hope to help a survivor build informal supports in her/his own life. We can provide education and support to family members, friends, neighbors, or supports within a faith community.

All services to victims of sexual violence are voluntary. The goal of ACCESS is to help a survivor decide what course of actions she/he is ready to take, to prepare for these steps through education and support, and empowerment.

**As part of their sheltering services**, ACCESS operates scattered-site emergency sheltering in Ames. This shelter primarily serves Story County, with open spaces also available to any victim in need. An individual in need is encouraged to call to discuss the need for shelter. If a victim is looking for shelter from another area outside of ACCESS' service area, we encourage that person to be in touch with the shelter or domestic violence program in your area to best assess all options and coordinate services.

Their shelter is designed to alleviate the immediate housing needs associated with fleeing domestic violence, sexual assault, or other forms of violence. An individual or family entering shelter is provided with basic needs like food, clothing, personal hygiene products, and other items to help them feel comfortable. A shelter resident is offered assistance in seeking immediate and long-term safety, processing the violence, and case management centered around finding the next best stable housing option.

ACCESS is also in its second fiscal year having an advocate specifically for Homicide and Other Violent Crimes.

**2. Program Strengths. Pick two to four factors that contribute most importantly to the program/service outcomes. Do not list everything that is satisfactory. We will assume that things not mentioned are okay. For each strength, describe some supporting evidence.**

A. Scattered-site housing gives ACCESS a chance to put clients into housing that will allow them to more easily work back into a traditional living situation and provides for use of federal funding monies that prefers the scattered-site model. It also allows for more space and independence that has proven key for clients to become comfortable leaving shelter housing. ACCESS previously had staff onsite at one of the shelter sites, but through interviewing shelter clients have decided that this position didn't add any benefit to their clients. This has made it possible to hire a full time housing advocate, and also lead to bednights consistently going down.

B. There is a strong relationship between ACCESS & other local organizations that benefits both organizations (for example, partnering with YSS & ERP for Reggie's Sleepout).

C. There is a strong, dedicated, and experienced group of staff and volunteers that understands working w/ people in crisis. ACCESS is fully staffed for the first time in over a year. They have a strong team and their prevention staff is strong. Because they are fully staffed they have more opportunities to work on public awareness and get clients fully integrated back into independence.

**3. Program Weaknesses. Select factors that detract most from the program/service achieving its outcomes. Present details as described above. Recommendations for reducing these weaknesses should follow the discussion of each weakness.**

A. Staff turnover/lack of funding for staff-because of the nature of the work and not enough funding, keeping ACCESS fully staffed is a challenge. Not being fully staffed leads to repeat clients. Even though ACCESS is fully staffed, this current staff level isn't adequate to provide full services and expand care.

**4. Financial Outlook. Current funding concerns should be described. In addition, the assessment of the program's plan to cope with shrinking resources should be given.**

The agency continues to become more financially stable and learn how to adapt to the changing resources. They have been able to work not only with ASSET funders, but have found other sources of revenue to maintain all of their programs. With a dedicated full time director and financial person on staff, now they are able to work on more funding strategies and apply for more long term grants. An issue they are finding is that grants aren't able to cover staff time. The board of directors has approved for ACCESS to pull from cash reserves this fiscal year.

**5. Internal Management Practices. Summarize your assessment of the management of the agency, and the role of the Board. If there are deficiencies, details should be provided. Conclude with recommendations when appropriate.**

ACCESS has hired a full time Director and she has been onboard since February. They currently have three administrative staff that focus on HR, Grants and Fundraising and Financials/Budget. The entire staff is committed to ACCESS and is demonstrated by the time commitment and effort they make towards the agency. The staff are highly competent and the history and philosophy of the programs work well together.

**6. Agency Suggestions/Comments. Make note of any suggestions, comments or questions agencies may have with regard to the ASSET process, budget forms and or anything else that relates to the process.**

One of the issues with the current ASSET process is that there are times when it is tough for a staff member to be able to tell what category that the staff should be counting as hours. There are times when they might initially meet with a client of domestic violence for counseling, but then the counseling could also have some system counseling or an education piece. During those times, it can be tough to distinguish what rate and what hours ACCESS should be putting down for ASSET. This is leading to ACCESS not being able to draw down funds for some client. They also noted that they feel it's hard to ask for an increase in funding for housing when the actual number of clients served hasn't gone up, but their current staff level of 3 isn't adequate. They need a staff of 4-5 to adequately serve the level of need.

It was also noted that a lot of times there is a requirement for clients to have a last known address for ACCESS to draw down funds for them. It is common for some clients to not give this information at the time of staff emergency response or they don't have a last known address.

Staff also wanted it noted that they are using a new database so the numbers may be off this year

### **General Assessment**

ACCESS seems to be doing an excellent job of meeting its core objectives through strong Board involvement; an experienced and dedicated staff, good relationships with partnering agencies, and effective processes. The staff continues to demonstrate a resilience and goodwill that enables them to move forward in identifying and meeting the needs of those they provide services and programming too. In talking with staff, the number of crimes being committed is on the rise, but with current funding they aren't able to increase their capacity to help the growing number of victims. Even though ACCESS is fully staffed, this level of staff isn't adequate to meet the demand for the number of clients needing services.