

**AGENCY: All Aboard for Kids**

**LIAISON: Matt Soderstrum**

**DATE:** October, 2018

## **1. Need for Program**

All Aboard for Kids is a six-week summer enrichment program designed to focus on academic continuity for children with autism spectrum disorder. In 2018, the program served 23 students, an increase of 3 from the summer previous. Of these 23, eleven are on the autism spectrum. There are really no summer program options in Story County designed specifically for these kids. Some programs reach out to children with disabilities, but not specifically targeting the unique needs of those on the autism spectrum.

### **All Aboard for Kids meets the following funder priorities:**

- **United Way:** Education: children and youth have access to the building blocks for academic success; and community awareness strategies, outreach and advocacy services exist community-wide.
- **Story County:** Prevention and early intervention services that provide outreach, advocacy, and academic success
- **City of Ames:** Youth development services and activities - Provide services for social development
- **Central Iowa Community Services:** Treatment designed to improve a person's condition

## **2. Program Strengths**

All Aboard for Kids utilizes quality staff. They are hand picked, with a high staff to student ratio. The program also strives to integrate “typical” students with those on the autism spectrum. Peer to peer learning is enhanced and brings a sense of “normalcy” to the students. In 2018, 11 out of 23 were not on the autism spectrum.

## **3. Program Weaknesses**

Program development is a challenge. There are lots of ideas and possibilities, but it takes programs and talent to go down a specific direction. This is a fairly new organization and the future of the program could go down many paths. This is exciting, but a little overwhelming. The executive directors have met with similarly run programs and are excited about where All Aboard for Kids can go, it just will take people and resources to get there. Also, to get talented workers will take resources – which are limited.

## **4. Financial Outlook**

All Aboard for Kids is seeking funding in order to keep tuition costs at a minimum. Many of the families served have financial challenges and cannot afford the tuition – especially with other services in which their children are involved. Likewise, with this being a fairly new program, it has been run on a very limited financial basis. Resources will need to increase if it is to grow and meet the need in Story County.

## **5. Internal Management Practices**

Currently All Aboard for Kids is run by the founding couple – Michael and Lisa McCarty. They have a Board of Directors that seem to be very involved with the organization.

## **6. Agency Suggestions/Comments**

There is some concern on how best to submit budget stuff to ASSET as fiscal years do not line up. ASSET begins their fiscal year on July 1, which is right in the middle of the programming for All Aboard for Kids. This proposes a challenge.

### **GENERAL ASSESSMENT:**

All Aboard for Kids is a fairly new program that is seeking to fill a void in Story County – especially for kids on the autism spectrum. The McCarty's are excited about the potential of this program to expand and include more kids. To do this, it will take resources as tuition dollars alone can be an inhibiting force for some.

Currently they are utilizing the Gilbert Schools for classroom space for their summer programs. This can be challenging and with a lot of construction planned in the school district next summer, will be even more challenging.

They are considering a change in the scheduling format – going from half-days to full-days. They also realize they need help with communication, making their organization more known on a wider basis in Story County.

With all things considered, I believe that All Aboard for Kids is on a good trajectory.