

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: Center for Creative Justice (CCJ) **LIAISON:** Ashley Thompson **DATE:** 10/26/18

1. Need for Program.

The target client population is low-risk offenders assigned by the Court who need probation rehabilitation and additional social determinants services. Currently, approximately 550 clients are served by the CCJ, with one-quarter of the client population represented by Iowa State University (ISU) students. Additionally, the CCJ has seen an increase in serious mental illness (SMI) among their target population which has led to an increased need for more one-on-one services and support from the organization's probation officers (POs).

Believed to be one of only two organizations of its kind nationally, the CCJ is a unique non-profit service that has been serving clients in Story County since 1974.

Without this service by CCJ, Offenders would simply receive a fine or jail sentence with little or no rehabilitative effort & absolutely no supervision which could impact our community. Annual cost for Jail/Prison is \$30,000 which is paid by taxpayers. CCJ's probation cost is roughly 1% of that at \$300-575 which is paid by Probationer. CCJ compliments the state funded Office of Probations who serve high-risk offenders.

The CCJ meets the following priorities established by ASSET Funders:

- City of Ames: #1 and #2
- CICS: Treatment designed to improve a person's condition; recovery support; service coordination; justice system-involved services; and services supported by evidence-based practices.
- Iowa State University Student Government: Substance abuse prevention and treatment; and programs that empower traditionally discriminated-against peoples.
- Story County: 1, 2 and 3
- United Way of Story County: Health – Result 2 and 3; Education – Result 3; Financial Stability – Result 1, Result 2 and Result 3.

2. Program Strengths.

The CCJ has consistently demonstrated annual client non-recidivism (not committing another offense within one year) rates above 90 percent, with the most recent rate at 94 percent. In addition, the CCJ has most recently reported that 86 percent of clients have successfully completed probation.

Led by Mr. Craig Evans, the CCJ has a highly trained and credentialed staff, with three full-time POs who maintain full client caseloads, along with Mr. Evans and an Office Manager (also both POs) who provide probation services as part of their roles (.75 and .25 FTEs, respectively) in addition to their management and administrative responsibilities. Additionally, the CCJ utilizes interns from ISU to assist with the overall functioning of the programs and services offered to clients.

The staff utilize responsivity, an evidence-based practice that matches clients with a specific PO who may have a specialized educational background, skills and/or personality attributes that best meet his or her needs.

Last year marked the implementation of a new anger management program which has since been successfully completed by approximately 25 clients who have either been court-ordered or have been recommended to complete the program by a PO.

These results directly correlate with what the CCJ team described as a “ripple effect” on the Story County community in that clients learn positive coping skills and strategies that assist in maintaining sobriety, securing and maintaining employment and developing healthy behaviors and relationships, among others.

3. Program Weaknesses.

While not a program/service weakness, Mr. Evans did express concerns with the rising cost of health insurance for CCJ employees and the impact it would potentially make on employee recruitment and retention in the future should they be unable to offer it in the future.

4. Financial Outlook.

ASSET funding accounts for approximately one-quarter of the total funding for the CCJ, with the remaining 75 percent of revenue from client fees. Mr. Evans noted that approximately \$1,000 was raised through the CCJ’s Annual French Toast Fundraiser, \$2,000 from a letter campaign and an additional \$2,300 provided by the Story County Community Foundation to support CCJ programs and services.

Mr. Evans explained that the CCJ encourages, but does not require, clients to pay enrollment fees up front. Clients have the option to pay up front, set up a payment plan for the duration of their probation or pay at the completion. Historically, clients have primarily paid at the completion of their probation; coupled with more of CCJ’s clients with “high case level” requirements (serving longer probation sentences) in recent years, this has created a lag in receipt of fees and has led to financial challenges. Mr. Evans indicated that a number of clients are currently or will be completing probation in the next one to two years, which will provide additional revenue that has been previously unrealized. In addition, the CCJ is seeing more clients with serious mental illness (SMI) which generally requires additional time that the POs spend with individual clients.

As in previous years, the CCJ does not have control over the size of their client population/caseloads as they primarily rely on referrals coming from judges/court, which can have an impact on the organization’s financial health.

5. Internal Management Practices.

Mr. Evans and his staff are impressive in terms of their knowledge, expertise and insights in to their client population and the breadth, depth and cadence of the services and support they provide. With POs specially trained to support clients with SMI, substance abuse disorders and anger issues, among others, the CCJ team is acutely aware of the importance their organization provides to clients and communities throughout Story County and work diligently to manage their finite human capital and financial resources.

I did not have the opportunity to meet with the Board or attend a Board meeting as the next scheduled meeting is not until after this report was to be submitted, so I am unable to provide an assessment on its role.

The CCJ has not increased its client enrollment fees in over ten years. While Mr. Evans expressed concerns in raising the fees and the potential issues this may cause for some clients who have limited financial means, I would recommend a thorough evaluation of a potential raise in fees as a means of providing additional financial stability to the organization. I would also recommend potential additional fundraising and exploration of philanthropic support from community members or organizations to provide additional funding streams as needed.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT:

Like the Story County ASSET, the CCJ is a unique organization that has served the county in providing a highly-collaborative approach to meeting the needs of its population. From a public and community health perspective, the CCJ has consistently met the needs of members of our community who might not otherwise have support and services needed for them to move forward in developing lifelong skills that will be of benefit to themselves, their families and the Story County community. From a financial perspective, the CCJ clearly provides an effective service that constitutes both a direct and indirect cost savings to Story County communities; the CCJ cost-per-client is approximately one percent (\$300) of the annual taxpayer cost (\$30,000) of incarceration. This is a critical program that serves a high-need population in our community.