

Legal Aid Liaison Report

Kimberly Stephens, Nov 2018

Need: The Legal Aid Society of Story County provides legal representation in civil matters for low-income residents of Story County for those who have an income at or below 150% of the poverty line. They have worked 210 cases this year with a four to six week wait period, except for time sensitive cases. Most of their cases are regarding family law, but some are evictions and social security cases. 74% of the clients are female and 50% of clients have mental health disabilities. Their overall goal is give their clients a more stable home and family life.

Strengths of the Program: The program is well managed and 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. With three lawyers, they recently increased their aid to those with incomes at or below 150% of the poverty line based on the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report, which made clear they weren't meeting needs of this group.

Their lawyers serve for long term and have a lot of community knowledge. The whole staff is compassionate and go the extra mile for their clients. They hand our resources for other agencies, many of whom have other needs like mental health issues, and help schedule appointments for clients. The creation of the Volunteer Lawyer Project has helped to place clients who would have a conflict of interest and can't be represented by the lawyers on staff.

Further, the staff is creative with solving issues, as evidenced from the October Board Meeting. They're looking for new ways to solve their problems, such as looking at out of the box solutions for transportation issues. Also, they work with Iowa State University Students to provide interpreters for their Spanish speaking clients. This creative problem solving keeps a healthy atmosphere in the office.

Weakness of the Program: Transportation is forever an issue for their clients. Many of their clients live in Ames but the office is in Nevada. They've attempted to solve these issues with HIRTA and gas cards. Also, their office isn't completely handicapped accessible and sometimes they have to use the area outside of their office for wheelchairs that are too wide to fit through their door. Most of their weaknesses deal with location and not the program itself.

General Assessment: Legal Aid of Story County is an asset to the community that uses its funds wisely and fills a critical need.

Future Outlook: The benefit of remain in Nevada is becoming less significant with electronic filing, bringing up the possibility of either moving to Ames or creating a satellite location in Ames. However, rent is much more expensive in Ames, so for now remaining in Nevada and working on the transportation issue is currently the direction they're taking.

They also do not turn anyone away based on their immigration status. They recognize a need for clinics on deportation, though that is not in the works at this time.