

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: Center for Creative Justice (CCJ) **LIAISON:** Ashley Thompson **DATE:** 11/12/19

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, CCJ is actively serving 500 clients with over one-quarter of the client population represented by Iowa State University (ISU) students. Additionally, the CCJ serves over 1,000 clients annually (with 70 percent being between the ages of 19-29) and continues to experience an increase in clients with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) among their target population. This has led to an increased need for more one-on-one services and support from the organization's probation officers (PO). Possession of controlled substances continues to be the most common reason for client enrollment in the CCJ, followed by Operating While Under the Influence (OWI), assault, theft, fraud and public intoxication.

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 the client. CCJ compliments the state-funded Office of Probations who serve high-risk offenders.

Through an evaluation of the ASSET Funder Priorities for FY 2021, Ms. Schram and the CCJ indicated that the organization and the services provided meet the following priorities:

City of Ames

- Priority 1: Meet basic needs, with emphasis on low to moderate income
- Priority 2: Meet mental health and chemical dependency needs).

Iowa State University Student Government

- Priority 3: Substance abuse prevention and treatment
- Priority 4: Programs that empower traditionally discriminated against people
- Priority 5: Legal services not provided by Student Legal Services with a specific emphasis on probation services

Story County

- Priority 1: Services addressing basic needs
- Priority 2: Services addressing safety and well-being needs
- Priority 3: Services promoting self-sufficiency

United Way of Story County

- Health
 - Result 2: Children, youth and adults have access to needed mental health care
 - Result 3 Story County residents are emotionally and physically well

- Education
 - Result 3: Story County residents are educated on local issues and are provided tools to advocate for themselves and others
- Financial Stability
 - Result 1: Access to basic needs
 - Result 2 Increasing income
 - Result 3 Increased financial capability

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 93 percent. In addition, the CCJ has most recently reported that 87 percent of clients have successfully completed probation.

Following the retirement of Mr. Craig Evans, Ms. Taylor Schram assumed the role as Director of the CCJ in August. Prior to this role, Ms. Schram served as the CCJ Office Manager and as a PO for the organization. In addition to serving as Director, Ms. Schram will maintain a caseload (.25 FTE) and has background and experience in mental health, which serves as an asset to the organization as they are experiencing greater numbers of clients with SMI.

CCJ has a highly trained and credentialed staff, with three full-time POs who maintain full client caseloads, along with Ms. Schram and an Office Manager (also both POs) who provide probation services as part of their roles. Additionally, the CCJ utilizes three 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.

Established in 2018, the CCJ has continued to offer its anger management program which has had 22 successful completions by clients in the last Fiscal Year (FY) who have either been court-ordered or have been recommended to complete the program by a PO. Ms. Schram indicated that the CCJ is experiencing an increase in the number of judges who are court-ordering individuals to the CCJ anger management program specifically. The program cost is \$25 per session for eight weeks.

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 weakness of the actual quality of programs and services being offered by the CCJ, Ms. Schram did discuss that the organization exhausted their most recent ASSET funding allocation in February – which was much earlier than expected. Additionally, the CCJ has not previously developed or implemented a long-term strategic plan; however, Ms. Schram provided background and evidence that plan development is in process and will be evaluated and approved by the CCJ Board in 2020.

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. Ms. Schram noted that approximately \$1,000 was raised through the CCJ's Annual French Toast Fundraiser and additional \$2,300 was provided by the Story County Community Foundation to support CCJ programs and services. The CCJ's annual letter campaign is in process and has historically raised around \$2,000. Ms. Schram is completing a class on fundraising strategy and intends to implement new strategies to further support the organization.

The CCJ offers a sliding fee scale of \$300 to \$575 for clients. Ms. Schram 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. Ms. Schram explained that the CCJ has not raised client fees in ten years; however, there have been concerns expressed by staff and board members with raising fees as they are currently the same amount as the Department of Corrections. 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.

Ms. Schram and the CCJ staff continue to be recognized by city and county attorneys, judges and the Story County community for 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.

As mentioned under the "Financial Outlook" section, The CCJ has not increased its client enrollment fees in over ten years. While Ms. Schram 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 and was pleased to learn that Ms. Schram is focusing attention to this area.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments.

Ms. Schram expressed her appreciation for the ASSET New Funder Training that was offered earlier this year as this provided her with additional guidance on the annual funding process.

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.