

Lutheran Services of Iowa

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Lutheran Services of Iowa (LSI) provides a broad range of services to families in Story County and throughout Iowa. Services offered in Story County and funded by ASSET include Crisis Child Care, Parents as Teachers, and Family Development/Education (summarized in detail below).

Organization. Judy Meierkord and Jenn Plagman-Galvin met individually with Alyssa Barton (program coordinator) and attended a team meeting for lead LSI staff in Story County. LSI has more than 150 staff governed by a local advisory council and a statewide board. The staff is mission-driven and cares deeply for the children and families they serve. The organization is financially stable -- supported through community resources, private donors, grants and ASSET funding.

Crisis Child Care. Serving families with children 0-12 years old, this program provides free, short-term childcare to families experiencing an emergency/crisis situation and lack the resources and/or social support to provide safe and appropriate care for their children. Situations may include family death, hospitalization, homelessness or domestic violence. Licensed childcare providers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Placements are for a maximum of 72 continuous hours, and LSI staff work with families to identify long-term solutions for their situation, if needed.

Parents as Teachers. A program for at-risk/families with children ages 0-5 links parents (single, married, unmarried, moms and dads) with resources including community activities, groups, general enrichment opportunities, employment agencies and Early Access (for children with developmental delays). Staff trained as Certified Parent Educators provide home visits serving families identified at-risk, dealing with issues related to poverty, or have a child with special needs. Goals established for the children/family include child developmental milestones. Parents are able to network with other parents through Parent Groups. Children receive screenings to assess cognitive skills, language, social-emotional skills, motor skills, vision, hearing and health.

Family Development/Education. The Nurturing Parent Classes include participants either referred by DHS or voluntarily enrolled. Child abuse prevention is the goal of the program and is addressed through an eight-week curriculum including parenting strategies, health and nutrition, positive discipline, special needs, early literacy, communication, sibling rivalry, stress/grief, among other topics. In addition to the eight-week required curriculum for DHS participants, educational opportunities offered two-three times weekly include speakers, meals and networking with other parents.

Highlights/Opportunities. LSI strives to facilitate their mission through collaboration with service providers across the county. This philosophy leverages the strengths and expertise of multiple organizations holistically supporting program participants without duplicating services.

The diversity of program participants is also a strength of the program. Several opportunities are on the horizon for LSI. Demand for their programs remains high and they are continuously evaluating how to best serve their constituents. Highlights include:

- LSI programming is currently moving out of People Place.
- Annual referrals to LSI programs continue to increase.
- The expansion of Parents as Teachers program to Boone has allowed for more balanced staff facilitation in both Story County and Boone.
- In the last year, 21 families have been turned away for Crisis Child Care assistance due to a void in the number of eligible childcare providers for the Crisis Child Care program. LSI notes an overall deficiency in affordable, quality childcare options in Story County.
- Recruiting, onboarding, training and retaining staff requires continued effort.

New Funding Request. The Parent Café, a program piloted last year, received positive feedback/program assessment and will be an ongoing program offered by LSI. The program is a research-tested model where parents and families network with one another to discuss issues of interest to them, exchange ideas with peers to solve problems, and develop a support network through relationships formed through the program. LSI included The Parent Café as a new funding request in their ASSET budget for the coming year.