

Legal Aid Liaison Report

Kimberly Stephens, Nov 2019

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 worked 204 cases this year with a ten to twelve week wait period, except for time sensitive cases. This is longer than it was last year but they have added an online application for intake that is very popular and may be why there is a wait time increase. Additionally, they had one attorney on maternity leave for part of the year.

Most of their cases are regarding family law, but some are evictions and social security cases. 74% of the clients are female and 47% 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. This is their second year of continuing 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 out 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. This is very successful in Story County but they do run into some issues placing clients with needs in Polk County.

New this year, they added a ramp to make their offices in Nevada more accessible to handicapped clients. They have also secured a satellite office in Ames by sharing space with Good Neighbor on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month starting in November. This arrangement will be rent free and will have office supplies available. They will need to provide their own printer.

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. With the addition of two days a month in Ames, this will help alleviate some of these issues, however, it is expected that these dates will be very popular and fill up quickly. They will continue their program of gas cards and transportation vouchers for the clients, as well.

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: They are currently applying for a grant to create a logo and a marketing strategy for the Legal Aid Society. Because of the similar name, it is often confused with Iowa Legal Aid, a different program.