

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: Mid-Iowa Community Action (MICA) **LIAISONS:** Ashley Thompson and Lisa McCoy
DATE: 11/12/19

1. Need for Program.

The mission of Mid-Iowa Community Action (MICA) is to provide opportunities to people in vulnerable situations. They equip individuals and families to achieve stability, security and success. They collaborate with families and partners to create communities where fewer people find themselves in poverty, and those who do have a path out.

Programs and services provided by MICA and funded by ASSET include the Story County Dental Clinic, Child Dental, Story County Emergency Food Pantry, Steps to Success and Fluoride Varnish and the Nevada Full-Day Preschool Program. The target population are low-income, uninsured patients as well as insured by Medicaid and other income-based insurances from their mid-year report. These services are connected closely to Human Services

During the most recent ASSET Fiscal Year (FY), the Dental Clinic has seen an increase in unduplicated patients, with 1,270 served (an increase from 1,013 served in the previous FY) and 87% of those patients living in Story County (an increase from 75% in the previous FY). MICA leaders indicated that the top priority for funding continues to include the need to raise more dollars for the Dental Clinic due to Medicaid pre-authorizations denied and even more reductions in retroactive payments.

MICA continues to experience an increase in the number of individuals who are accessing the Food Pantry, with 3,042 households with 8,848 individuals accessing the pantry more than once between January and October of 2019. MICA is in the process of implementing changes to the food selection process by becoming a “choice pantry” at least two days per week, which will allow greater autonomy in selecting individual food items (as opposed to the current process where MICA staff make selections on behalf of food pantry recipients).

The Steps to Success program has also experienced an increase in enrollment, with 50 individuals in 18 families accessing the program in the most recent FY – an increase from the 27 individuals in 13 families served in the previous FY. Fortunately, the program has been able to accommodate the growth in enrollment and no individuals or families are currently on a waiting list.

In its second year of offering, the Nevada Full Day Preschool Program (“Head Start”) continues to serve the maximum number of students allowed in the classroom setting, with 16 children being served. Children are selected to be in the Head Start program based off certain family factors and risk factors, ensuring children and families most in need of services are offered priority for enrollment.

The Fluoride Varnish program continues to meet the needs of uninsured residents of Story County who earn less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This prevention-based program focuses maintaining oral health and reducing the potential need for costly restorative dental services.

Through an evaluation of the ASSET Funder Priorities for FY 2021, Ms. Gloria Symons, Health Services Director, and Ms. Abra Huffaker, Family Development Partnership Manager, indicated that MICA meets the following priorities:

- **Basic Needs:** Through access to the food pantry, emergency help with electric and heating bills, and one-time payments to heating bills with the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Additionally, MICA also help families apply for Medicaid and other resources as needed. This also keeps families in stable housing, because they can use their income for rent or housing payments.
- **Education:** Through the MICA home visiting programs, including Head Start, Steps to Success, and Family Development and Self Sufficiency, MICA is educating families on all aspects of life, including but not limited to: parenting, education, budgeting, employment, mental health, advocacy, and community engagement. Specific to the Head Start classroom in Nevada, the program focuses on preparing children to be “school ready” (Kindergarten). Additionally, MICA staff work in the homes with the parents on issues previously described, as well as family and community engagement.

2. Program Strengths.

While longtime MICA Executive Director Arlene McAtee retired earlier this year, a new Executive Director, Clarissa Thompson, has been named and is in place to continue to lead the strategic direction and oversight of the organization.

The Dental Clinic provider staff has stabilized with one full-time dentist and one dental hygienist on staff – with the dentist signing on in a full-time capacity in July 2018 – along with an additional hygienist providing additional care in the clinic one day per week. A new Dental Clinic office manager is in place and has been working with a consultant from the Iowa Association of Public Health (?) have been assisting with scheduling and efficiency improvements. Additionally, it was noted that no children are turned away from the Child Dental and Fluoride Varnish programs and the Clinic is providing a needed service for the county’s Medicaid population as virtually no other dental providers are accepting new Medicaid patients and/or are not providing services to the Medicaid population.

A year and a half ago, MICA hired a staff member who is focused on grant writing, management and research which has helped expand potential opportunities for new revenue streams.

3. Program Weaknesses.

The Food Pantry continues to experience challenges in food shortages, which is consistent with what other pantries across the state and the Food Bank of Iowa. While efforts to partner with community leaders (Lauris Olson, Story County Supervisor, was specifically mentioned) to implement food drives are being planned or considered, the MICA staff did express concerns with their ability to meet the growing needs of residents. Additionally, MICA leaders noted that workforce challenges are of concern to the organization with high turnover in its entry-level positions.

MICA leaders explained that raises had not been given to staff or Dental Clinic providers which may be a cause of concern related to long-term retention.

4. Financial Outlook.

A top priority for MICA is revenue and Medicaid reimbursement for services provided, particularly in the Dental Clinic, as a means to sustain operations. While the current Dental Clinic fee structure ensures that their patients can afford the care they need, it creates a gap in

funding. The Dental Clinic continues to accept only one of the state's two Dental Wellness Plans, Delta Dental, and the reimbursement rates remain lower than commercial insurance plans.

With food banks across Iowa experiencing ongoing shortages, MICA has had no choice but to purchase items from local grocery stores like Walmart (which are typically at a higher cost than the Food Bank of Iowa) to continue to meet the needs of food pantry recipients.

MICA leadership maintains their focus on revenue strategies and diversification of funding streams, including additional grant and other opportunities, to help ensure financial sustainability.

5. Internal Management Practices.

While staff turnover was noted, MICA seems to have stabilized their leadership and provider team, with Ms. Symons continuing to serve as a strong, experienced leader and advocate for the organization. Additionally, Ms. Huffaker has served in a variety of roles with MICA for the past six years and demonstrated solid planning and strategy in the management and expansion of the food pantry for Story County residents. Finally, with a new Executive Director in place and continued continuity with Dental Clinic providers this shows stability in the organization's ability to develop and execute strategic priorities and provide services to residents. Finally, with the focus on performance improvement in the Dental Clinic with the use of a consultant to increase efficiency, this demonstrates MICA's commitment to continuous improvement and increasing the level of service to patients and ultimately, improved financial performance.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments.

Ms. Symons and Ms. Huffaker expressed their appreciation for the ongoing funding and support of ASSET and indicated the level of support for their programs and services is unmatched by any other county in which they are located.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT:

MICA has continued to prove itself as vital community-focused organization that is meeting the needs of Story County residents, both through ASSET funded and non-funded programs. MICA has consistently met the needs of Story County residents 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, MICA is focused on revenue & reimbursement, quality and efficiency improvements, with ongoing performance improvement efforts and diversified funding stream.