

ACCESS Liaison Report

Liaisons: Jennifer Schill, Max Ruele

1. Need for Program. Describe who the target population is and whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing. Indicate the source of this information. Also, indicate how the program/service is different and how it is similar to others and what would happen if the program/service ceased to exist. List the priorities established by ASSET Funders, which the programming addresses.

The mission of ACCESS is to address the roots and impact of domestic and sexual violence through services that enhance safety, empower survivors, and promote understanding and social justice within our community. The mission of ACCESS is to address the roots and impact of domestic and sexual violence through services that enhance safety, empower survivors, and promote understanding and social justice within our community.

All services provided by ACCESS are free and confidential.

- 24-hour Crisis Lines: Listening, support, information and advocacy
- Housing: Safe, temporary emergency sheltering and housing for victims and their children.
- Children's Programs: Counseling, advocacy, outings, and play groups.
- Individual Counseling: Short-term counseling to adult survivors of child sexual abuse, sexual assault, or domestic violence or dating violence.
- Support Groups: Support groups for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and children who have experienced or witnessed family violence.
- Advocacy: Support, information and referrals for clients working with the legal, medical, or social service systems.
- Community Education: Educational programming to schools, community groups, organizations and agencies.
- Crisis Response Services
- SART (Story County Sexual Assault Response Team): Crisis support and on-going advocacy.
- Homicide and Violent Crimes support

Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 515-292-5378 or Toll Free 800-203-3488

Domestic Abuse Crisis Line: 515-292-0519 or Toll Free 855-983-4641

Housing/Sheltering Crisis Line: 515-292-0543 or Toll Free 855-696-2980

ACCESS is one of the few entities to provide both shelter (housing) and emergency services for sexual and domestic assault. They meet the funder's requirements for crisis intervention, assistance to low and moderate income families, safety, health, and well-being to children and adults, and programs and services that promote personal safety with regards to violence and substance abuse, both in Ames and Story County.

As part of their sexual assault services, ACCESS provides FREE and CONFIDENTIAL support to victims of sexual violence. ACCESS understands that an experience of sexual violence is highly personal.

Therefore, any victim may want to take time considering all options for service, and make the choices that best meet her/his comfort level.

- Our 24-hour crisis line 1-800-203-3488; for a victim, friend, family or support to reach an advocate to discuss safety and support needs.
- Response: In-person, 24/7 response to victim in need, such as when reporting sexual violence to law enforcement or a medical provider, or to another location where a victim is seeking help. **This has changed since the Covid Pandemic. Response is now less in person because of restrictions and more of a telehealth or over the phone interaction with the victim.
- Criminal Justice Advocacy: support to a victim as she/he reports a crime, or is involved in later proceedings relating to the crime such as meetings with attorneys or court hearings.
- Systems Advocacy: assistance to a victim in seeking help from, or explaining needs to systems such as a workplace, to a medical or counseling provider, or to a school/ university.
- Community education and training; to help all community members engage in the fight against sexual violence and to enhance community members and professional's skills to increase protections for victims. ** This aspect of their services has been affected, especially on Campus due to the Covid Pandemic. Staff is trying to come up with new innovative ways to reach the community without having to meet in person with groups.

Sexual Abuse Counseling:

An advocate can provide counseling to assist a survivor of sexual violence in recognizing the impact of abuse, to identify the strength that she/he had in surviving this abuse, and to recognize resources that can be utilized for long term healing. We strive to increase a survivor's own capacity to heal in whatever way she/he feels is most beneficial. Whenever possible, ACCESS strives to connect a survivor to a long-term specialized resource such as a counselor or therapist. Since the Pandemic this service has moved more to telehealth rather than in person sessions. Staff report that they have actually seen an increase in willingness of victims to participate and also are being more open in their sessions. In addition, we hope to help a survivor build informal supports in her/his own life. Another positive that has come out of the Pandemic is that support groups are meeting virtually, so victims that are in the more rural areas of the county can now participate much easier. We can provide education and support to family members, friends, neighbors, or supports within a faith community.

All services to victims of sexual violence are voluntary. The goal of ACCESS is to help a survivor decide what course of actions she/he is ready to take, to prepare for these steps through education and support, and empowerment.

As part of their sheltering services, ACCESS operates scattered-site emergency sheltering in Ames. This shelter primarily serves Story County, with open spaces also available to any victim in need. An individual in need is encouraged to call to discuss the need for shelter. If a victim is looking for shelter from another area outside of ACCESS' service area, we encourage that person to be in touch with the shelter or domestic violence program in your area to best assess all options and coordinate services.

Their shelter is designed to alleviate the immediate housing needs associated with fleeing domestic violence, sexual assault, or other forms of violence. An individual or family entering shelter is provided with basic needs like food, clothing, personal hygiene products, and other items to help them feel comfortable. Since the Pandemic this has changed some, they are now not allowing 2 unrelated people

to be housed in the same room. Also, before the Pandemic each shelter wasn't equipped with internet. They have now added that service at each location which makes it much easier for kids and clients needs for school and different virtual therapies they have chosen. A shelter resident is offered assistance in seeking immediate and long-term safety, processing the violence, and case management centered around finding the next best stable housing option.

ACCESS is also in its third fiscal year having an advocate specifically for Homicide and Other Violent Crimes.

2. Program Strengths. Pick two to four factors that contribute most importantly to the program/service outcomes. Do not list everything that is satisfactory. We will assume that things not mentioned are okay. For each strength, describe some supporting evidence.

A. Scattered-site housing gives ACCESS a chance to put clients into housing that will allow them to more easily work back into a traditional living situation and provides for use of federal funding monies that prefers the scattered-site model. It also allows for more space and independence that has proven key for clients to become comfortable leaving shelter housing. ACCESS has added internet to each location which is helping kids and victims access school and therapies much easier. ACCESS previously had staff onsite at one of the shelter sites, but through interviewing shelter clients have decided that this position didn't add any benefit to their clients. This has made it possible to hire a full time housing advocate, and also lead to bednights consistently going down.

B. With all of the changes that the Pandemic have brought ACCESS had to make some of their services virtual. In doing so, staff has seen a positive response to more younger adults responding in therapy better and being more willing to participate. As well as victims in rural areas that might not have been able to easily participate in support groups, can now participate and feel more comfortable participating in those groups because there is a perceived space created with the group meeting virtual.

C. There is a strong, dedicated, and experienced group of staff and volunteers that understands working with people in crisis. Previous years their Emergency Shelter has seen staff turnover, but currently that hasn't been the case. Their Assistant Director position has been open for over a year, but this has forced the Administrative Team to ask WHY? In doing so they found that previous people in that position found that it was too much of a "kitchen sink" position and they have restructured that position into two separate positions. One position is a Fundraising position and one is an HR position. They have filled the Fundraising position and are rolling out new strategies and excited to have someone more dedicated to marketing/PR for the organization. The HR position is currently open and they are actively looking.

3. Program Weaknesses. Select factors that detract most from the program/service achieving its outcomes. Present details as described above. Recommendations for reducing these weaknesses should follow the discussion of each weakness.

A. In the past ACCESS has said yes to a number of opportunities presented to them to offer new services or expand services to gain new funding streams. Staff hasn't had the manpower to effectively evaluate if these services serve their clients well. Their Admin team and Board have made a 3 year goal to evaluate each program with an equity lense and also create boundaries for what services they will continue to provide and new opportunities to say "yes" or "no" to.

4. Financial Outlook. Current funding concerns should be described. In addition, the assessment of the program's plan to cope with shrinking resources should be given.

The agency continues to become more financially stable and learn how to adapt to the changing resources. They have been able to work not only with ASSET funders, but have found other sources of revenue to maintain all of their programs. With a dedicated full time director and financial person and the newly created Fundraising position on staff, now they are able to work on more funding strategies and apply for more long term grants.

5. Internal Management Practices. Summarize your assessment of the management of the agency, and the role of the Board. If there are deficiencies, details should be provided. Conclude with recommendations when appropriate.

ACCESS has had a Director in place for a couple of years which has helped the organization financially as well as staff stability. They currently have four administrative staff that focus on HR, Grants and Fundraising and Financials/Budget and the Director. The HR position is currently open and they are searching for applicants to fill that position. The entire staff is committed to ACCESS and is demonstrated by the time commitment and effort they make towards the agency. The staff are highly competent and the history and philosophy of the programs work well together. As mentioned earlier they have had board turnover because of ending terms, but this has brought fresh life and energy to their board. They are looking at expanding their board a little so terms overlap and expand their board diversity pertaining to geographical representation as well as occupational.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments. Make note of any suggestions, comments or questions agencies may have with regard to the ASSET process, budget forms and or anything else that relates to the process.

Staff reported that they really liked the virtual training that ASSET has provided this year due to the Pandemic. They hope that these training sessions will stay virtual or at least have that option. It made it much easier to attend.

General Assessment

ACCESS seems to be doing an excellent job of meeting its core objectives through strong Board involvement; an experienced and dedicated staff, good relationships with partnering agencies, and effective processes. The staff continues to demonstrate a resilience and goodwill that enables them to move forward in identifying and meeting the needs of those they provide services and programming especially in this time of uncertainty and change due to the Pandemic. They have adapted well and some services have changed for the better.