

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: Center for Creative Justice (CCJ) **LIAISONS:** Joel Hochstein & Lydia Youngquist

1. Need for Program.

The Center for Creative Justice (CCJ) serves 900-1000 non-juvenile clients yearly with individualized case management services. Greater than 50% of these clients scored below poverty guidelines and qualified to use a sliding fee-scale for services. CCJ is unique to our community and is the only organization that is currently providing probation services for folks who are lower-risk and don't need to be supervised by Corrections. CCJ's probation supervision services help clients learn new behaviors and help them move forward from the event that cause legal involvement. These new behaviors aid the client in avoiding a cycle of continued involvement in the criminal justice system. CCJ also hosts an affordable anger management program that has recently served approximately 18 clients.

CCJ is beneficial for non-participant county residents as this rehabilitation service saves taxpayers money as the clients themselves are responsible for paying the fee for service. Probation is approximately 1% the cost of incarceration. If CCJ ceased to exist, taxpayers could expect to see an increase in costs related to jailing folks and could see an increase in folks getting caught in a cycle of repeated criminal justice involvement.

CCJ staff have an excellent relationship with the Story County Attorney's Office (SCAO) and have worked closely with them on the services they provide. They are currently working with the SCAO on the newly developed pre-trial mental health diversion process and are beginning to assist clients with supervision in these areas.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, numbers have been down at CCJ as there were fewer arrests and court hearings during the spring. However, with the increase in movement for folks in recent months, combined with the court systems restarting, cases are steadily returning to normal levels.

Staff believe that CCJ meets the following priorities:

ISU: Priorities #3 and #5

Story County: Priorities #1, #2, and #3

City of Ames: Priorities #1 and #2

United Way of Story County: Health (2 & 3), Education (3), and Financial Stability (1, 2, & 3)

2. Program Strengths.

CCJ boasts a success rate of 84%. This means that 84% of clients assigned to probation completed their probation successfully. They also have a non-recidivism rate of 90% when measured 1 year following release. This means that at 1 year post completion of probation, clients have not had any further involvement with the criminal justice system. This is due to the focus on behavioral changes, which allows the clients to learn and grow to be more successful within the community.

Staff are trained in motivational interviewing and work to develop strong rapport with clients and are invested in their success. Due to this combination of training and genuine care, staff are able to connect clients with other social support services and have often referred to other ASSET funded agencies to help them with their overall health, wellbeing, and chances of overall success.

It is also worth noting that CCJ is actively using available demographic data and information from the Clear Impact Scorecard to analyze various aspects of their services. They continue to educate their staff by doing racial equity trainings and indicated that the client success rate between clients who identify as African-American and/or Black were within .5% of those who did not identify as African-American and/or Black. This shows that CCJ is using data to inform the success of their services, especially in spaces where racial equity gaps may exist.

3. Program Weaknesses.

CCJ indicated that some unpredictability on client fee collection combined with not having much control over how many clients they serve can impact financial uncertainty and planning. They have now added the ability to pay for services online which has helped collect client fees.

Staff also indicated that a staff member is currently on military leave, leaving them with less staff to serve clientele. Due to the pandemic, this was not necessarily an issue in the spring, but may now be more of an issue moving forward. Staff indicated they are prepared to make adjustments as needed.

4. Financial Outlook.

Overall, ASSET funding is the 2nd highest source of revenue for CCJ outside of client fees. ASSET funding assists their low-income clients pay for CCJ's supervision/probation services if as they qualify. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CCJ was able to get a PPP loan and are working to have this loan forgiven. The Board of Directors now also has a fundraising and grant committee to assist with raising funds for the program. CCJ indicated that this last year they ran out of ASSET funding for the city and county in March and from the ISU Student Government in April.

5. Internal Management Practices.

CCJ employs an Executive Director, three full time probation supervision staff, an office manager who also handles a small case load and three unpaid student interns. A diverse set of community volunteers make up their Board of Directors which meets every other month. This 13 person board has been more focused on the financial and policy aspects of the organization in recent years, as well as being resources to CJJ's clients when needed. A new strategic plan has been drafted and it awaiting comments by the Board of Directors.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments.

CCJ's Director stated that she has been impressed with the support she has received from the ASSET volunteers and staff in recent years as she is a newer director of the organization. She indicated appreciation for the volunteer liaison visits and this process for both the organization and for ASSET and its volunteers.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT:

CCJ is a one-of-a-kind organization among ASSET funded organizations. The program serves to rehabilitate, educate, and connect clients in ways that help them get back on their feet. CCJ refers many clients to other ASSET funded organizations for social services including mental health, housing stability, food stability, financial stability, and substance use education/counseling. CCJ saves the taxpayers money through their supervision/probation services and helps clients in the process. This organization is vital to our community and especially to those in our community who are justice-involved.