

Johnson County Social Services General Assistance Program FY20 Annual Report

July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

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General Assistance (GA) is a program that provides short-term help to Johnson County residents in financial crisis and most generally at risk of homelessness. GA offers a safety net for those generally not eligible for other governmental programs and promotes community strength by encouraging individual stability, and self-sufficiency. Financial assistance is available to eligible applicants for rent, utilities, prescriptions, food/provisions, and burial/cremation.

As per the Code of Iowa, Chapter 252.25, counties are required to provide General Assistance for poor persons in need. The code directs the Board of Supervisors in each county to establish general rules and eligibility requirements for the program.

Effective July 1, 2019 revised General Assistance Guidelines went into effect. The primary changes included an increase in rent assistance, the first such change in four years, and expanded eligibility for the One-Time Assistance Program. Rental assistance increased \$50 for one and two member households, \$75 for three member households and \$100 for those with four or more members. Eligibility for the One-Time Assistance Program expanded from 100% to 130% Federal Poverty Guidelines.

Programs Offered

The General Assistance Program (GA) provides one-time, short-term and burial assistance to Johnson County residents in need. Eligibility is based on household income and other factors. A complete list of eligibility requirements is available on the Johnson County website at www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/GA or by contacting Johnson County Social Services.

The Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program (IAR) provides ongoing financial assistance for individuals applying for disability benefits through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) of the Social Security Administration. An eligible applicant may receive monthly assistance, not to exceed the current General Assistance benefit per month, for the duration of eligibility. Upon approval of SSI benefits, the Social Security Administration reimburses Johnson County the total amount that the client received in benefits through the IAR program.

The General Assistance Program utilizes the federal poverty guideline to determine financial eligibility. Households must have an income not to exceed 50% of the federal poverty guideline - \$532/month for single; \$718/month for a 2-person household – in order to meet the income eligibility criteria of the guidelines and potentially be eligible for the Short-Term Program (up to 3-months of assistance in a 12 month period). Households with incomes between 51% and 130% of the federal poverty guidelines - \$1382/ month for a one- member household - may be eligible for the One-Time Assistance Program (one month of assistance in a 12 month period) if other eligibility criteria are met.

Johnson County Profile

Johnson County is home to an estimated 151,140 residents or 58,163 households. The average household size is 2.39 persons. (2019 US Census data estimate). Youth under the age of 18 consist

of 20% of the population and persons over 65 year constitute 12.3% of the population. 17.8% of residents live in poverty compared to 11.7% statewide. (American Community Survey Tables, US Census Bureau)

The FY20 Fair Market Rent per month for an efficiency apartment was \$705, \$774 for a one-bedroom, \$1,011 for a two- bedroom unit and \$1,488 for a three bedroom. The 2020 estimated average wage of renter household in Johnson County was \$9.96/hour, while the estimated housing wage (wage needed to afford a two bedroom home at the Fair Market Rent rent) was \$19.44hour (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2020). In FY20 the maximum rent benefit available from Johnson County General Assistance Program was \$450 per month for a one person household, \$500/month for 2 persons, \$550/month three persons and \$600 for four or more person household.

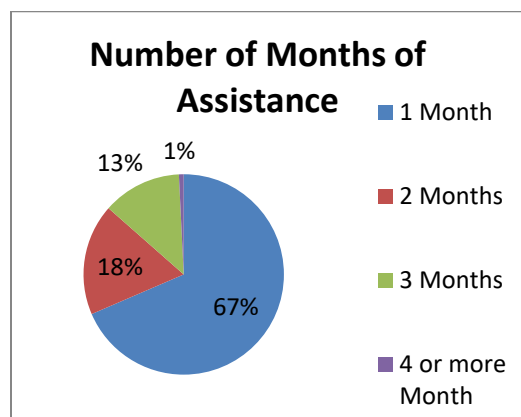
Services Provided

Households seeking assistance must submit an application for each month in which help is requested. For those seeking subsequent months of assistance, documentation of employment search is required unless medical verification supports the applicant’s inability to work. In FY20, the General Assistance Program approved 782 of the 1,003 applications received. A total of 536 households received assistance. Providing information and referrals to other community resources is an important component of the General Assistance Program. In FY20, 1,281 referrals were provided to additional local resources.

Table 1: Application Summary

Year	General Assistance Applications received	Number of households assisted	GA Applications Assisted (months of assistance provided)	Households assisted residing in Johnson County longer than 12 months	Households assisted residing in Johnson County less than 12 months
FY 20	1003	536	782	392	144
FY 19	1125	604	915	409	193
FY 18	1094	564	871	417	147
FY 17	1091	549	874	404	145

Chart 1: Months of Assistance



60% of the applications approved for assistance qualified for the Short-Term Program, 36% for One-time, 2% burial and 3% for the Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program. 67% of households accessing General Assistance received help only one time during the fiscal year (Chart 1). On average, households received 1.5 months of assistance. The monthly average amount of assistance provided per application, excluding burials, was \$463.

Table 2: Applications and funding approved by program

Year	Short-Term Program	Funds allocated for Short -Term Program Assistance	One-Time Program	Funds allocated for One-Time Program Assistance	Interim Assistance Reimbursement	Funds allocated for Interim Assistance Program	Burials Assisted	Funds allocated for burials
FY 20	467	\$219,024	278	\$132,106	14	\$5,579	23	\$49,975
FY 19	578	\$260,147	291	\$135,600	30	\$12,634	20	\$43,400
FY 18	559	\$226,189	244	\$ 99,517	50	\$15,405	20	\$41,323
FY 17	498	\$198,454	254	\$100,957	87	\$29,957	26	\$49,405

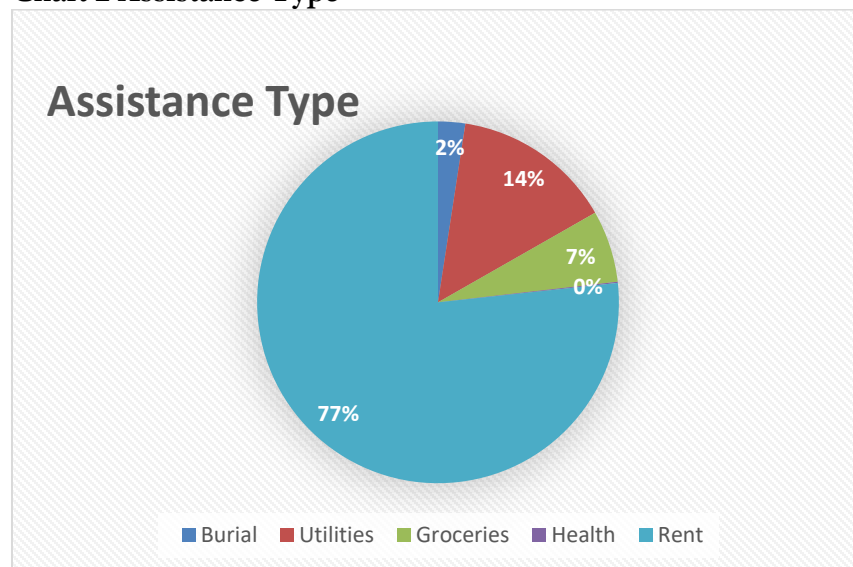
FY19 first year for expanded one time – extending eligibility from 100% Federal Poverty Guidelines to 130%.

Table 3: Financial Assistance Detail

	Medical	Prescriptions	Rent	Groceries	Utilities	Burial	Bus
FY 20 Assistance	\$99	\$0	\$339,635	\$2,463	\$14,052	\$53,875	\$3,196
Total: \$413,320							
FY 19 Assistance	\$0	\$217	\$380,210	\$3,435	\$21,995	\$39,500	\$1,760
Total: \$447,217							
FY 18 Assistance	\$0	\$410	\$316,411	\$3,098	\$21,872	\$43,423	\$1,894
Total: \$387,108							
FY 17 Assistance	\$0	\$489	\$307,389	\$4,056	\$20,814	\$44,924	\$742
Total: \$378,415							

Funding amounts based on date service paid, not date services were authorized

Chart 2 Assistance Type



Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program

The Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program (IAR) provides ongoing financial assistance for those applying for disability benefits through Supplemental Security Income (SSI). An eligible applicant may receive monthly assistance not to exceed the current General Assistance benefit per month for the duration of eligibility. Eligibility continues as long as the consumer is meeting program requirements and until a determination is made at the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) phase. Eligibility for the IAR Program ends once denied at the ALJ stage. Upon approval of SSI benefits, Social Security Administration reimburses Johnson County up to the amount that the individual received in benefits from the IAR Program. The remainder of the SSI back pay is provided directly to the consumer.

Table 4: Summary of IAR

	Cases	Cases approved for SSI	Cases denied by SSI	IAR reimbursement received by County
FY 20	4	1	1	\$1,750
FY 19	4	3 (2 from prior year)	1	\$9,155
FY 18	8	6 (1 from prior year)	1	\$29,096
FY 17	13	2 (1 from prior year)	3	\$5,145

Cases documented as being denied SSI during one fiscal year may have been approved during subsequent fiscal year. The cases reported have been denied at the Administrative Law Judge level. Many consumers continue to appeal beyond this stage. Should they have a favorable decision at a later stage the General Assistance Program is still reimbursed for support provided to the applicant even if they are no longer actively involved with the General Assistance Program.

General Assistance Demographics

In FY20, 536 households were approved for General Assistance. Fifty-eight percent were single-family households while 36% included children in the home. The average number of children per household was 2.2. Female-headed households represented 63% of those receiving assistance. 69% of approved applicants who reported being able to work had employment income.

Table 5: Percent of cases by age of applicant

	17-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60 years and up
FY 20	28%	29%	22%	16%	5%
FY 19	29%	28%	24%	15%	5%
FY 18	32%	30%	20%	13%	5%
FY 17	28%	29%	22%	16%	5%

Table 6: Percent of cases by race/ethnicity as reported by the applicant

	African American /Black	Asian	Caucasian	Latino/Hispanic	Native American	Sudanese	Other	Not Identified
FY 20	56%	1%	32%	6%	.1%	2%	1%	3%
FY 19	52%	.3%	36%	6%	.1%	2%	1%	3%
FY 18	50%	1%	37%	8%	0	2%	.05%	0%
FY 17	45%	1%	40%	7%		2%	2%	3%

Percent of cases by city of residence:

57% Iowa City
 34% Coralville
 7% North Liberty
 1% Tiffin
 1% Hills
 <1% Oxford
 <1% Lone Tree
 <1% Swisher
 <1% Solon

Outcomes

The General Assistance Program solicited customer service surveys from individuals applying for General Assistance. Individuals who were both approved and denied for assistance were invited to provide feedback. Anonymous surveys were returned from 83 program participants.

88% reported that without help from General Assistance they likely would have lost their housing (faced eviction)

89% reported that without help from General Assistance they likely would have had their utilities disconnected

100% reported that their phone calls were received in a friendly and timely manner

100% reported that they received an appointment in a timely manner

96% reported that they were greeted politely and respectfully by the receptionist

100% reported that the General Assistance worker treated them with respect and courtesy

99% reported that the General Assistance worker took the time to listen to them, understand their concerns and answer their questions

100% reported that they were treated fairly by the General Assistance worker

95% reported that the General Assistance worker provided referrals to other programs

Many survey respondents also included comments about their experience with General Assistance. There were many positive comments about interactions with specific staff and much appreciation expressed for the program in general. A few comments regarding the best thing about their experience with General Assistance:

- *“Mrs. Susan was a true god send. She not only helped me get rental assistance but made the extra effort to help me feel welcomed. Made my life livable! Without General Assistance I wouldn’t have a stable place to live”*
- *“Jessica is a great worker. Very understanding. She listened to all my concerns and did her best to help me.”*
- *“They leave me with hope to keep moving forward and that it is okay to need a little help”*
- *“The peace of knowing that I won’t lose housing and heat for my kids”*

- *“Getting heard by a patient worker and getting access to the resources I need”*

Community Collaboration

This year the General Assistance Specialists met and shared information with Johnson County Public Health and Iowa Workforce Development. One of the GA Specialist, for the 5th year, led the planning for the Community Connections Day, working with staff from Shelter House, Jail Alternatives, and Iowa City VA. She also recertified in Mental Health First Aid. The General Assistance Specialists regularly attended the Refugee Alliance and Local Homeless Coordinating Board meetings.

Beginning in March, the General Assistance service delivery model changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While normal outreach was not possible the GA Specialists worked together to adjust programming. Applications were received and processed by phone, email, fax and other methods. Resource and referral information was provided to the Iowa Finance Authority Eviction Prevention Program, the eviction moratorium as well as several other programs in an effort to ensure stable housing for those most affected by the pandemic.

Case Profile

Case Profile 1

Jerry contacted General Assistance in May. He had recently been let go from his job, but had already started a new one. Due to gap in receiving his first paycheck from his new job, he was concerned about how to pay his June rent. General Assistance was able to approve \$450 toward his rent under the expanded one-time program. This covered the majority of his rent. He was also provided with a referral to CommUnity for the Basic Needs Assistance Program, LIHEAP, Food Assistance, and Medicaid to give him additional supports as he went through this job change. He has not contacted our office since his application was approved.

Case Profile 2

Jennifer initially came to General Assistance in December. She had been working but had a hospital stay so her income was low. GA approved a month of rent assistance. Her income continued to decrease as her health problems became more severe. She applied for Social Security Disability. Jennifer continued to be in and out of the hospital and General Assistance provided two more months of rent assistance. She was then approved for the Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program while she awaited the decision from Social Security and an additional two months of assistance were approved. Jennifer was then approved for Social Security Disability benefits and could pay her own rent. The General Assistance allowed Jennifer to remain in stable housing during a difficult transition.