



Who is AMOS and Our Work for Children's Mental Health

AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy) is a collective of 37 churches and non-profits in Central Iowa who work together to identify issues affecting our communities, and we seek to craft and implement systemic solutions. We are non-partisan, and we focus on issues. We teach members of our institutions the skills of citizenship: how to build power, identify issues, act on them, and create a community which works for all.

AMOS' Children's Mental Health Team was created following a series of house meetings in which we heard many stories of families and school personnel around the needs of children. In February 2017, we held a community conversation around children's mental health in schools, which led to the creation of the research action team. We have spent much of the past 2 years learning about the state of children's mental health care in Des Moines, Polk County and the State of Iowa.

In this research, we learned about a study commissioned by Mid-Iowa Health Foundation, United Way of Central Iowa, and the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, and lead by Orchard Place. That study clearly identified both the needs and the solutions to meeting the mental health crisis needs of Central Iowa's children and youth. The AMOS team became committed to being part of the solution.

In 2018 and early 2019, we had the opportunity to approach the City of Des Moines about providing funding for these needed services through the proposed local-option sales tax. While the City does not typically provide human service funding, they agreed that it made to sense to invest in crisis services, as currently most calls for these services end up being handled by City staff via police and fire personnel. They included these services in the local-option sales tax spending resolutions, and the tax passed. We had a partner in this work.

At the same time, we decided to form an implementation team to help build the needed services. We knew Orchard Place would be on board, and the City of Des Moines. We met with several of the Polk County supervisors, and they agreed to join the team as well. We now have a team that is working together to implement what was identified in 2017, what we worked on in 2017-19, and what the legislature has now mandated be provided for our families.

Our Implementation Team is focused on the establishment of mental health services specifically for children, to include:

- a 24-hour hotline available to anyone with a need
- mobile crisis teams specifically trained to work with children to go to the location of need, wherever that might be
- an observation/stabilization/crisis center where children can go in lieu of the ED to de-escalate, be assessed and receive the necessary information as to what next steps could be taken and where needed services exist



The State's Mandate: What You Should Know About Bill HF690

In 2019, the Iowa Legislature approved Bill HR690, which was signed into law by Governor Kim Reynolds. This bill, in brief, requires children's mental health services be implemented, to include:

1. establishing a children's behavioral health system
2. establishing children's behavioral health system state board
3. providing certain children's behavioral health core services

The objective is to provide behavioral health services al all children in the state of Iowa who need the services, regardless of the place of residence or economic circumstances.

To be eligible for these services a child is deemed as any one under eighteen and a resident of Iowa who has been "diagnosed with a serious emotional disturbance".

Behavioral services shall include:

- treatment to ameliorate a child's serious emotional disturbances and
- comprehensive facility and community-based services regardless of diagnosis

Specific services shall include

- a statewide 24-hour hotline that incorporates information regarding services
- mobile response
- crisis stabilization community-based services

A plan to implement services is to be available no later than April 2020.

The plan shall begin implementation by July 2020.

What's Missing and What AMOS is Seeking

Mental health services are provided in Iowa via regions which are connected to county government. HR690 provides a mandate for the children's services to be provided, but it does not address the funding needed to build and provide those services.

Currently, there is no identified funding stream for these services. The regions currently use a county levy to provide adult services for mental health. This levy has been capped at a 1996 level, and while that may have been sufficient in 1996, it will not be enough to provide key services for both adults AND children in 2019.

We need a funding solution to come from the state. AMOS has been advocating for several years for a change in the levy, allowing regions to increase the levy in their region if needed to provide these services. We will continue to advocate for that option, as well as looking at a state-wide funding solution, if that becomes a better option.