

# **A STEP AHEAD CHATTANOOGA**

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## **Executive Summary**

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# A Step Ahead Chattanooga

## Findings from an Independent Evaluation

### Organization

A Step Ahead Chattanooga (ASAC) is a private and small donor-funded organization founded in 2014 with a mission to promote women's self-determination through an innovative, community-based approach: providing no-cost, long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) to women living in 11 southeastern Tennessee counties. LARCs, including intrauterine devices (IUDs) and implants, are the most effective reversible contraception methods, with effectiveness rates above 99%. Since 2014, the organization has helped to address unmet contraceptive needs across southeastern Tennessee and provide LARC access to a diverse range of clients.

"[ASAC] really was a life changer. They helped me with my women's health and my quality of life in general."  
- Former ASAC client

### Evaluation

In 2018, ASAC leadership in partnership with funding from the Benwood Foundation contracted RTI International, a nonprofit research institute, to conduct an independent evaluation to assess the impacts and potential

### Evaluation Methods



**Key informant interviews** with ASAC providers and philanthropic donors to understand how ASAC can meet the current and future needs of clients



**Focus groups** with women living within the ASAC service region, including former clients, to understand their needs and describe the impacts ASAC has already had in their community



**Analysis** of publicly available and client data to understand the existing needs of women living in the ASAC service region



**Simulation modeling** to predict potential impacts in the ASAC service region

expansion of services throughout southeastern Tennessee. This evaluation was designed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the organization's successes, challenges, and opportunities for growth, and to provide ASAC with actionable data to support program enhancement and leverage future funding opportunities. The mixed-methods evaluation used key informant interviews, focus groups, data analysis and simulation modeling to describe the current and potential impacts of ASAC in their community.

### ASAC Client Demographics\*



current student



previously pregnant



Hamilton county resident



uninsured



not using contraception prior to ASAC

N = 2,618  
\*Based on ASAC-reported data

## Key Evaluation Findings



**Ongoing education about LARCs is needed.** Misinformation about LARCs, particularly their safety, efficacy, and side effects, was common among women in focus groups and frequently cited by providers. Continued community- and practice-based education is essential to combat misconceptions, and peer-based education may provide added value.



**ASAC marketing is reaching some but not all women.** About half of women in our focus groups had not heard of ASAC; some had heard of the organization but were unsure of what services they provide. Sustained and targeted outreach efforts are important to increasing ASAC's brand awareness in the community.



**Clients cited personal, professional, and financial benefits of ASAC funding.** Clients describe the organization's services as life-changing, allowing them to pursue academic, professional, and family goals. Focus groups highlighted that without ASAC assistance, many clients would have been unable to afford their LARCs.



**ASAC enables providers to provide whole-person care without regard to cost, and providers seek to use resources judiciously.** When communicating with partners, ASAC may consider reframing their program as a service to cover LARC costs for individuals who face financial barriers—rather than framing as no-cost LARCs for all.



**Both local and national philanthropic organizations agree that organizations like ASAC fill a vital gap in their community.** Local donors cited ASAC's strong leadership, commitment to client autonomy, and vision for the future as key reasons for the continued giving.



**The potential impact of increased LARC use is significant and can be realized.** If only five percent of women in the ASAC service region switch from using a short-acting reversible contraceptive (SARC) to a LARC, five-year estimates predict approximately 760 fewer unintended pregnancies, 167 fewer induced abortions, and total savings of over \$8 million dollars.

### In the ASAC Service Region



