

IN THE IOWA DISTRICT COURT IN AND FOR STORY COUNTY

ALEXANDRA “SONDRA” WILSON, )  
Plaintiff, ) CASE NO. LACV053674  
)  
v. )  
)  
RELIABLE STREET INC, LOCKWOOD )  
CAFE, LOVE CLUB LLC, LYND SAY )  
NISSEN, SHARON STEWART, WILLA )  
COLVILLE, DENISE MARTINEZ, and )  
CHARLIE ESKER )  
Defendants )  
\_\_\_\_\_ )

**Exhibit A —Correspondence and Filings Related to Proceedings Before the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) (April 2022–September 2023)**

This exhibit is submitted to preserve the administrative record and to document the origin and procedural handling of representations later echoed in judicial filings.

This exhibit contains key correspondence and filings exchanged between the parties in connection with Plaintiff’s complaint before the ICRC. It provides evidentiary context regarding the administrative handling of the matter and the materials submitted to and considered by the ICRC. Specifically, it:

- Summarizes Plaintiff’s good-faith mediation attempts prior to the formal complaint (A-1 and A-2);
- Includes a copy of Plaintiff’s Complaint to ICRC (A-3);
- Identifies Defendants’ position statements (A-4 and A-5) connected with documents Plaintiff alleges were misleading, incomplete, selectively excerpted, altered, or presented out of context; documents are located in Exhibits C, D, and E;
- Highlights portions of ICRC’s determination letter reflecting consideration of Defendants’ submissions (A-6 and A-7);
- Provides procedural context explaining why Plaintiff is pursuing judicial relief after exhausting administrative remedies.

*The full ICRC case file is in Plaintiff’s possession and can be produced upon request.*

## Table of Contents

<b>Section 1 (Exhibits A-1 — A-2): Plaintiff’s request for mediation to Lockwood Café and Reliable Street, sent to Defendants Stewart and Nissen (April 12, 2022).</b>	<b>2</b>
Exhibit A-1 — Plaintiff’s Request for Mediation sent to Nissen/Stewart/Lockwood Café/Reliable Street (April 12, 2022): Defendants never responded.	3
Exhibit A-2 — Plaintiff’s final message to Nissen; no response (April 18, 2022).	9
<b>Section 2 (Exhibit A-3): Plaintiff’s complaint to ICRC (April 22, 2022).</b>	<b>10</b>
Exhibit A-3 — Plaintiff’s complaint to ICRC (April 22, 2022).	11
<b>Section 3 (Exhibits A-4 — A-5): Statements and Documents Sent by Stewart and Nissen to the ICRC on or around May 1 through July 30, 2022.</b>	<b>23</b>
Exhibit A-4 — Stewart’s unabridged statement to ICRC (on or around May 1 through July 30, 2022)	24
Exhibit A-5 — Nissen’s unabridged statement to ICRC (on or around May 1 through July 30, 2022)	27
Exhibit A-6 — ICRC’s Letter of Administrative Closure (August 3, 2022).	31
Exhibit A-7 — Key Excerpts from ICRC’s Preliminary Case Review (August 3, 2022).	33
<b>Section 5 (Exhibits A-8): Plaintiff’s Appeal to ICRC (September 3, 2022).</b>	<b>37</b>
Exhibit A-8 — Plaintiff’s Appeal to the ICRC (September 3, 2022).	38
<b>Section 6 (Exhibit A-9): Plaintiff’s Right-to-Sue Letter from the ICRC (September 6, 2023).</b>	<b>44</b>
Exhibit A-9 — Plaintiff’s Right-to-Sue Letter (September 6, 2023).	45

### **Section 1 (Exhibits A-1 — A-2): Plaintiff’s request for mediation to Lockwood Café and Reliable Street, sent to Defendants Stewart and Nissen (April 12, 2022).**

This section includes the letter sent by Plaintiff to businesses known to Plaintiff at the time:

1. Recounting management position and labor performed,
2. How Plaintiff was barred from the premises without a valid, disclosed reason,
3. How Defendant Colville admitted her complaint led to the action,
4. Evidence that Colville's complaint did not hold merit,
5. How Colville's allegations harmed Plaintiff's reputation,
6. A request for the businesses to institute a fair protocol for investigating complaints to prevent this from happening to others in the future, and
7. A request for mediation.

This section also contains a follow-up text after no response was received.

---

*Exhibit A-1 — Plaintiff's Request for Mediation sent to Nissen/Stewart/Lockwood Café/Reliable Street (April 12, 2022): Defendants never responded.*

---

Sondra Wilson  
[adraghastar@gmail.com](mailto:adraghastar@gmail.com)

Dear Lockwood Cafe and Reliable Street, Inc, to whom it may concern:

This past couple weeks have been very difficult for me since hearing from you “what some people were really thinking”. For several days and sleepless nights I wracked my brain “what did I do that made people feel this way?” Despite what I was told by Sharon and Lindsey, no one ever told me they needed space or that I was making anyone feel unsafe. It was not a case of me not listening: literally no one ever said anything to me.

My time at Reliable/Lockwood has fostered numerous friendships and acquaintances that have lifted my heart and made me feel like a valued and respected community member for the first time in life – including what I have thought/felt were friendships-in-development with you, the owners, Lindsey, Sharon, Austin – and many others. I’ve really felt part of something worth working for – projects that bring much needed healing to the city of Ames and central Iowa area. Since Thursday, April 31, when you approached me, I contacted friends from the space to find out who is in fact still my friend, and to determine if I’ve ever made any of them feel a certain way, to which I was prepared to apologize. All of them seemed as surprised as I was, and when I discovered who one of the complainants was – frankly I’m pretty surprised, but this entire thing could have been handled much better in a way that did not hurt me or others. I hope you will take the time to read through this letter to see through my eyes because I have been treated very unfairly – and I don’t believe that was your intent.

**Oct. 2021 I was asked to manage the garden.** Around July last year I was asked to manage Reliable Street’s garden based on my experience and because the garden was not being properly cared for.

**I coordinated with involved parties to my best ability.** Although Lindsay, Sharon, and Austin didn’t have much time to engage with it, I was directed to correspond primarily with Lockwood employees Willa Colville and Denise Martinez, and members of SHEPH with regard to planning and labor. Willa was the only person with time to put hands-in-the-ground (usually Mondays and Saturdays), and thus became my primary contact for correspondence between the garden and Lockwood/Reliable. All parties, however, were invited and many participated in the Discord server, and in-person meetings. I kept Lindsay, Sharon, and Austin informed when I felt was needed (since they didn’t join Discord) due to the fact that a primary complaint was that the previous managers did not keep open communication with Reliable/Lockwood. I included ideas proposed by related parties such as:

- using blueprints provided by SHEPH, created a step-by-step for use by the students how to sprout, (trans)plant, and care for each plant to help the students;
- improved the compost system and included plants for use at Lockwood as suggested by Sharon;
- connected SHEPH and Denise through Discord to coordinate use of to-go containers for sprouting as suggested by Denise;
- reworked the compost system and rain barrels with input from Austin;
- made plans with Sylvie to integrate her herb garden, offered to accompany her to purchase them when the time came, which we were looking forward to;
- integrated Sid’s compost sifting technique;
- and more.

Plaintiff’s Request for Mediation (A-1) — page 1 of 5.

**Conflict arose.** City regulations require that prairie (and related fires) must be 4 feet from all structures, streets, etc. Local prairie specialists suggested wetting wood chips prior to burning to create a sort of moat to protect infrastructure. I asked nearly everyone at Lockwood/Reliable if anyone had access to cheap or free 4x4s. Willa's family donated several which she helped install, yet more were needed. When spring arrived ~March 21-26 I was on spring break, and it suddenly became "go time" for the garden (weather was suddenly amazing). I went ahead and purchased enough 4x4s and mending braces (~\$145) to finish most of the project, and helped coordinate several more loads of wood chips to be delivered to the property.

Afterward I mentioned to Willa I'd spent a considerable amount of money on supplies, and that a few things were still needed. She told me to be sure to save receipts and encouraged me to speak with Sharon, Austin, and Lindsey. About a week later I asked if Austin had a moment, and he suggested I bring it up with Lindsey "She'll probably help." I brought it up with her and she didn't offer so I didn't want to press it (honestly I was happy donating the supplies, but we did need a few more things I couldn't afford). So last Wednesday (3/30/22) I asked Sharon if she had any ideas to help fund the garden – that we hadn't really talked about finances since I was appointed, and she set up a meeting with Lindsay, her, and me.

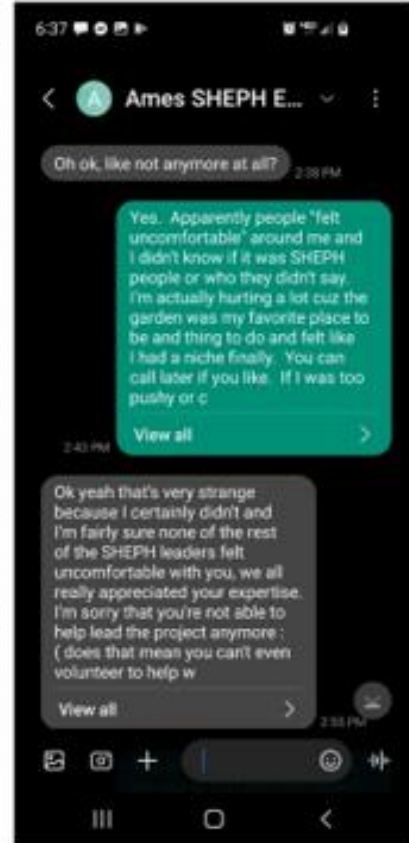
We met the next day around 3:30 pm, at which time I was informed I was no longer allowed on the property due to "multiple complaints" that people felt "unsafe" around me because I had "crossed boundaries". I had no idea who said these things or why, and when I mentioned this Lindsay and Sharon told me the person(s) claimed they "tried to tell me" and that I should read a book on active listening.

**I checked in with friends.** Upon leaving I was emotionally distraught and confused by the situation. I spent days wracking my brain as to who may have complained and why, and lost a lot of sleep over it still to this day. It makes no sense when I look how warmly I've been treated every time I came in. Decorations some of the baristas made on my to-go containers, for instance, are hanging on Cody and my fridge (pics below). I was always treated with a great deal of kindness and conversation from Lockwood employees, and tried to offer the same.

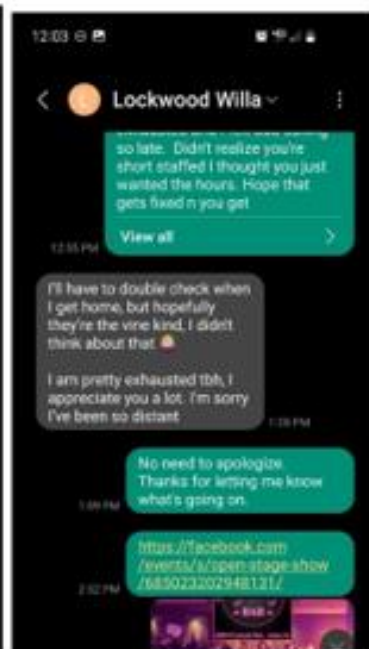
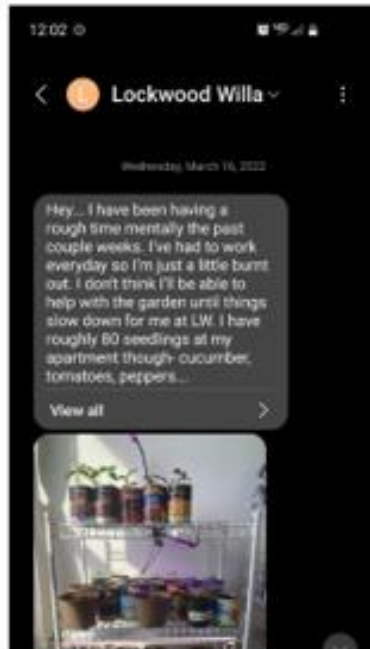


I was concerned about my reputation because when community members ask about me, what will people say? “She was making people feel unsafe and not respecting peoples’ space.” It makes me sound like a predator. As a transgender woman people already have this stereotype of me. I’m concerned what people around town will now think of me – how this affects my business and community relationships.

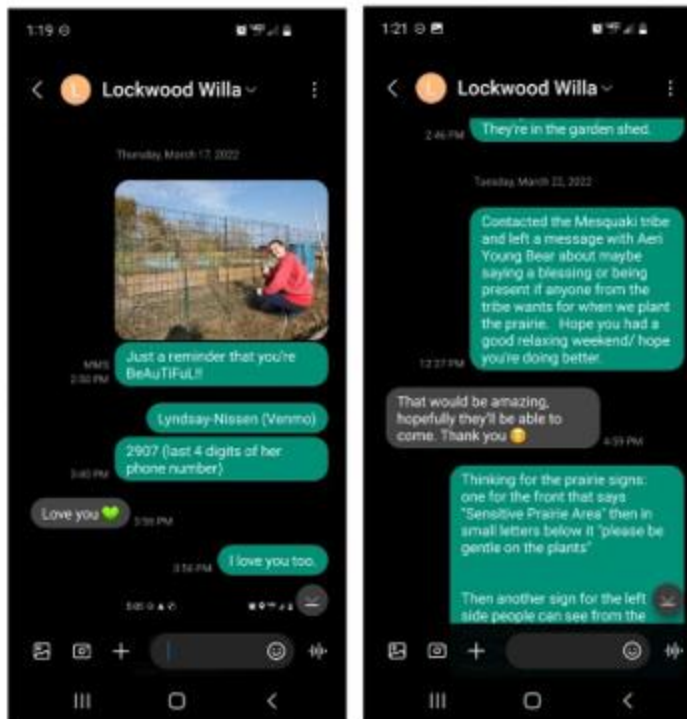
I contacted Sid who works with me in the garden and Emily from SHEPH because she and I talk regularly. I wanted them to know I was removed from the project and frankly its not fair for them to be told slanderous statements about me when they ask. I did wonder if one of the high schoolers complained about me because who knows maybe they didn't feel comfortable around a trans woman, so it was a heartwarming relief when Emily texted me the message shown at right. Sid also reassured me she never felt uncomfortable and she enjoyed working with me. Several other friends from the Lockwood/Reliable community told me I did not make them feel uncomfortable, and as hints of what may have happened came to light, I wondered if Willa complained – but that wouldn't make sense.



About a week before I purchased the 4x4s, Willa told me she felt burnt out from working too much because Lockwood was understaffed (texts shown at right). There was no indication I was intruding. In fact she added “I appreciate you a lot” and apologized for being distant.



The following messages between us within the coming weeks showed no indication I was violating her space. They showed the opposite. My message of “just a reminder that you're beautiful” was in response to her feeling overworked and burnt out. I was trying to be a supportive friend – maybe my intent was misconstrued? We have done so many things together including the LGBT+ events and whatnot I've considered her a friend.



On Monday, Apr. 4 I wrote her a letter regarding being told not to return to Lockwood/Reliable's property. Wasn't sure she heard what happened or could give me any clarity, and on Apr. 7 she replied with the following unexpected reply:



**My reputation was slandered, and my work sabotaged.** I do not know who the other party or parties were who complained about me, but it sounds like a similar situation: someone “felt” a certain way around me, never communicated such feelings to me, then complained about me. Looking back I cannot think of a single instance where I violated anyone's space there, including Willa's, but I assure if you I was ever told anything I would have backed off immediately and stopped doing whatever she or others didn't feel comfortable with.

I know you said the complainant(s) claimed they “tried to tell me”, but as you see in Willa's above texts, she went from typing “love you” and “I appreciate you so much” to out of the blue accusing me of something that damages my life. Even if invited back to the space, I do not feel safe around her, and I hope Reliable and Lockwood come up with better protocol for handling complaints.

As one elder to another I will tell you this: it is unwise and not safe for the community if we are teaching young women that if they *feel* a certain way around someone, they can simply complain and they will be empowered to ruin that person's life. It does not appear to me she will be held accountable for this. Young people should be taught to communicate clearly and in a fair manner; learn to establish boundaries. If she “tried to tell me” then what did she actually *say* to me? As she states in the above letter – she did not say anything to me. That is not the same as “tried to tell me”. The problem isn't that I didn't listen; the problem is I was not communicated with. I was then talked *about* instead of *with*.

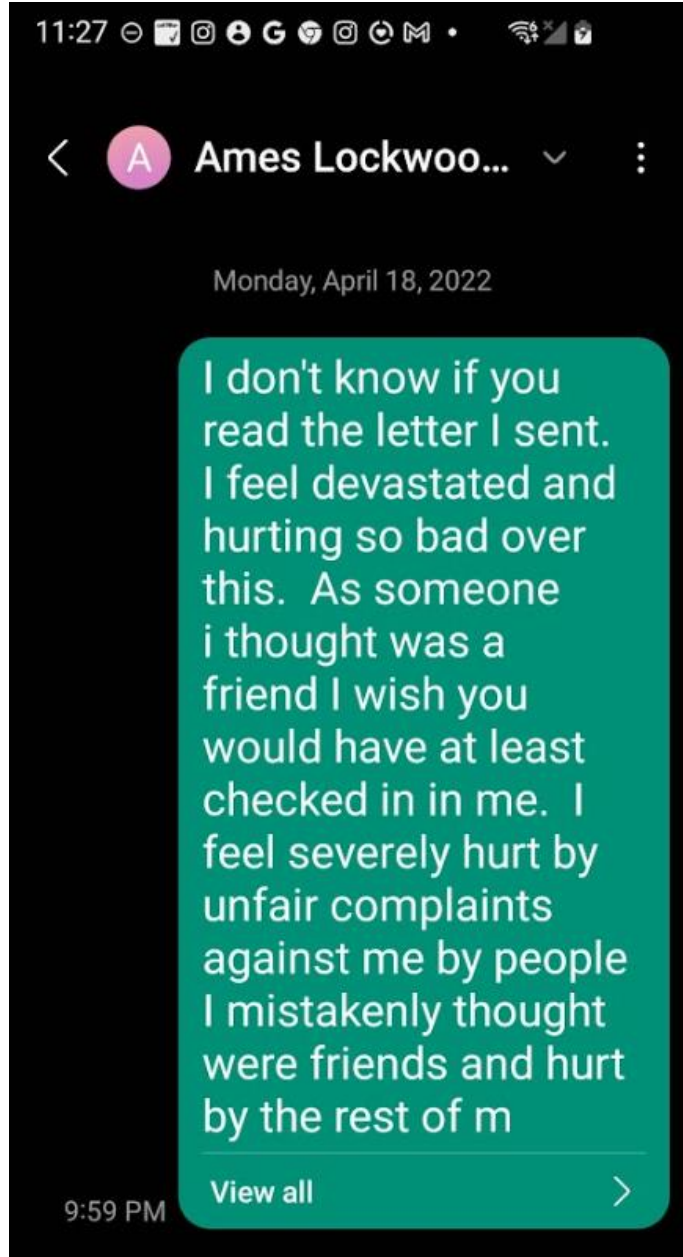
I have worked diligently, volunteering countless hours for Reliable and Lockwood. When leaving the situation I would have strongly preferred to have photos of before and after the garden and prairie restoration. Such photos would help build my portfolio so I could show other land owners what I am capable of doing and perhaps find work. Instead I leave empty-handed, my reputation slandered: “I was asked to leave because women complained I made them feel unsafe and I was violating their space.”

**Proposed problem resolution.** If you want to talk through any of this, I would like at least 2 community members who are mutual friends to be present so that things can be talked through and all sides are heard, and resolution can be fair. I would suggest maybe Travis or Vee. I personally feel I am due an apology. This really hurt my feelings and adversely impacts my life. Until you change your protocol for handling complaints against community members or employees, etc, please don't call yourselves a safe space. I do not feel safe as a result of how I was treated by your employee and how it was subsequently handled by your establishments.

Sincerely,  
Sondra Wilson

Exhibit A-2 — Plaintiff's final message to Nissen; no response (April 18, 2022).

---



**Section 2 (Exhibit A-3): Plaintiff's complaint to ICRC (April 22, 2022).**

Prior to filing her complaint, Plaintiff sought informal resolution and outside guidance concerning the conduct described herein. Plaintiff thereafter filed a complaint with the Iowa Civil Rights Commission on April 22, 2022.

Sondra Wilson

[sdwilson@dmacc.edu](mailto:sdwilson@dmacc.edu)

Complaint to Iowa Civil Rights Commission

**Summary:**

Following ~6 months managing and performing the vast majority of planning and labor on a garden and prairie restoration project on behalf of two local businesses ([Reliable Street, Inc](#) and [Lockwood Cafe](#)), Lockwood employee Willa Colville and “possibly” another person lodged slanderous complaints against me with the owners, [Lyndsay Nissen](#) and [Sharon Stewart](#). Instead of asking me about it or explaining to me what happened, the owners kicked me off the property and told me not to return. I was not reimbursed for months of labor improving the property, and was instead cut off from many community members and friends as a result of being slandered and banned from these businesses. I left robbed of my time and labor and emotionally drained – my reputation marred by the accusations. To this day don't know why she filed it nor do I believe the complaint has any merit. I don't know if there actually *was* a second complaint and *if* there was I am sure it is also false. The issue of being slandered is compounded by the businesses' unfair and discriminatory handling of the complaint(s) which gave no opportunity for me to show my perspective or evidence I believe clearly exonerates me. I find it suspicious and offensive they chose to do all this on Transgender Day of Visibility; I believe their actions were based on typical prejudices transgender women face.

Finally, it was not until after all this that I found out the property is owned by LOVE CLUB LLC – a business I had never heard of. I did not know I was performing free labor on behalf of a for-profit business. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act regulations, an individual cannot volunteer services to a private, for-profit company. I feel used and severely mistreated, and want reimbursed for my time and emotional suffering.

**Involved parties:**

- **Willa Colville** – employee of Lockwood Cafe. Filed a false report against me to business owners Lindsay Nissen and Sharon Stewart. Damaged my reputation.
- **Jane Doe** – although I haven't seen evidence that there was a second complaint nor can I fathom who the second complainant(s) may be, Lindsay and Sharon alleged that there was “more than one complainant”.
- **Lyndsay Nissen** – owner/operator of Love Club LLC and Reliable Street, Inc. Removed me from the property without compensation following ~6 months labor improving her business's property, thereby breaching our agreement.
  - **Love Club LLC** – registered owner of 4625 Reliable Street, where the incident occurred. I was not aware this business existed until after the incident, when looking up the property on the County Assessor's website.
  - **Reliable Street, Inc** – a 501c3 nonprofit that performs the majority of its operations at 4625 Reliable Street. I was under the mistaken impression the property was owned by this organization.
- **Sharon and Austin Stewart** – owners/operators of Lockwood Cafe.
  - **Lockwood Cafe** – Lockwood rents space on the property to run their cafe.

- **SHEPH (Students Helping End Poverty and Hunger)** – local high school gardening club that has permission to garden on the property. I was the appointed Manager of the garden, and assisted SHEPH with planning and labor. High school student Emily Hoag is the President. We interacted fairly frequently.

**Photos of the garden from Oct 2021 (before my work):**





**Some photos showing results of my work (more available upon request):**



**Weed abatement for prairie restoration:** I cleared the vast majority of the ~6' weeds shown in previous photos by hand (and scythe) with the help of local farmer and prairie specialist Nate Kemperman. Most of this area was going to be replaced with native prairie. Nate was one of three local prairie specialists I invited to the property to help with planning.

Plaintiff's Complaint to ICRC (A-3) — page 3 of 12.



**Mulch and wood frame:** City regulations require prairie to be planted 4' away from structures. Prairie restoration specialists suggested wood chips and 4x4s to be wetted prior to control burning to protect infrastructure. I arranged for (and loaded/unloaded) ~6 loads of mulch to be brought in to surround the garden and shed, and purchased many of the 4x4s for the project.



**Painted signs:** Sharon suggested I make signs around the garden where needed. Here is one of the signs I painted with my friend Lydia. I arranged to have the large water catchment in the background of the photo hauled to the property (and helped haul it).



**Additional work:**

All involved parties were invited to and many participated in the Discord server (<https://discord.gg/cv9gkY9XWh>) and in-person meetings. Although they did not have much time to be involved with the projects, I informed owners Lindsay, Sharon, and Austin when needed (since they didn't join Discord) due to the fact that one of their primary complaints was that the previous managers did not keep in communication with Reliable/Lockwood. I included ideas proposed by the various parties into the projects, such as:

- using blueprints and list of plants provided by SHEPH, created step-by-step instructions for use by the students: how and when to sprout, (trans)plant, and care for each plant.
- improved the compost system and included plants for use at Lockwood as suggested by Sharon. Invited ISU compost specialist Steve Jonas to the property to help improve Lockwood's composting system;
- tagged SHEPH and Denise in our Discord server to coordinate use of to-go containers for sprouting as suggested by Denise;
- reworked the compost system and rain barrels with input from Austin;
- made plans with Sylvie Smith to integrate her herb garden, we planned to purchase them from the nursery together when it was time to transplant;
- integrated Sid Barfoot's compost sifting technique;
- and more.

**Timeline:**

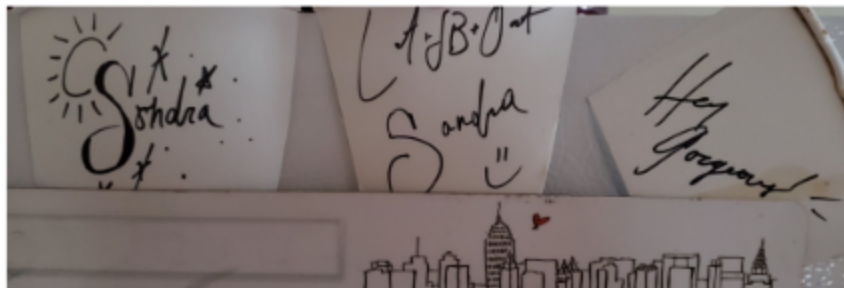
**October 2021 I was appointed Manager of the garden and prairie restoration** – Lindsay and Sharon asked if I would manage the garden because it was not being properly cared for by SHEPH. (I am an author known for my skills with gardening and native plants.) I agreed and proposed to install native prairie as well, which was approved. Lockwood Cafe offered me 50% employee discounts on all purchases. I essentially became the only adult manager working directly with SHEPH in order to plan and maintain the garden.

Soon I was directed to correspond with employees Willa Colville and Denise Martinez because they wanted to help with the garden, however both employees had little time available to devote to the project. Willa assisted me in the garden on a few occasions and thus became my primary correspondent on behalf of Lockwood. Willa and Denise attended meetings with SHEPH and me, and both joined and participated in the Discord server.

**March 2022 the project was going excellent** – After investing ~6 months of research and labor into the project, relations with all parties appeared to be excellent. I honestly felt I had developed lasting friendships with all parties, as well as surrounding community members who interact with Lockwood and Reliable Street. I received many compliments on the improvement of the garden area, including from the owners and their customers. I was asked to host the open mic events on more than one occasion when Lindsay was unable to.

**March 31, 2022 (Transgender Day of Visibility) removed from the project because of slanderous comments** – Lindsay and Sharon arranged for me to meet them at the garden to give a tour of the work I'd done and explain to them what supplies were needed. I was really looking forward to this, but instead when I arrived they informed me that "multiple people" complained that I was "violating their space" and made them feel "unsafe". I could not fathom who would have said these things, and asked why no one ever told me. They told me the complainants said they "tried to tell me" and that I should "read a book on active listening". I left in tears with no idea who may have said these things.

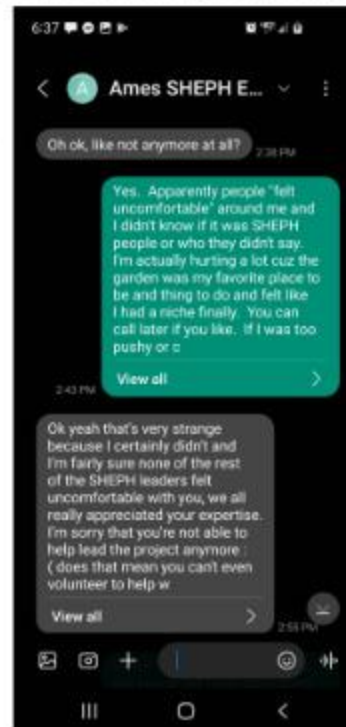
**April 1-4 investigated the situation, no one felt uncomfortable** – For several days and near-sleepless nights I felt stressed and confused by the situation. It did not make sense; I had no idea who said these things or why. I contacted several friends I interact with regularly through Lockwood/Reliable, and all of them told me that I have never made them feel uncomfortable. My fridge is decorated with sweet messages written on my to-go packaging by Lockwood employees (below): this did not make sense.



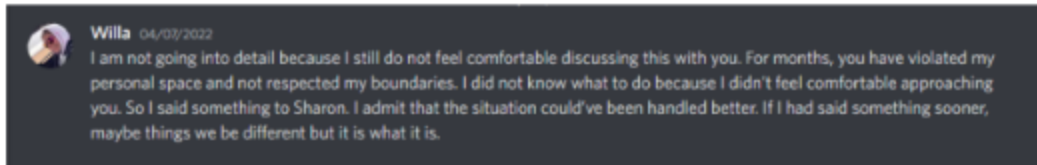


I was concerned about my reputation because when community members ask about me, what will people say? “She was making people feel unsafe and not respecting peoples' space.” It makes me sound like a predator. As a transgender woman people already face this stereotype of me, and I always try to be mindful about peoples' personal space. I'm concerned what people around town will now think of me – how this affects my business and community relationships.

I contacted Sid Barfoot who works with me in the garden and Emily Hoag from SHEPH because she and I talk regularly. I wanted them to know I was removed from the project and frankly its not fair for them to be told slanderous statements about me when they ask where I am. I did wonder if one of the high schoolers complained about me because who knows maybe they didn't feel comfortable around a trans woman, so it was a heartwarming relief when Emily texted me the message shown at right. Sid also reassured me she never felt uncomfortable and she enjoyed working with me. Several other friends from the Lockwood/Reliable community told me I did not make them feel uncomfortable, and as hints of what may have happened came to light, I wondered if Willa complained even though that wouldn't make sense. I wrote her a letter.



**April 7, 2022 Willa Colville informed me she complained** – Willa wrote the following to me, for the first time informing that she has felt like I've violated her space and not respected her boundaries. Although I don't know what I did that made her feel this way, if she would have told me any of this I would have absolutely complied. Honestly my interactions with her aren't much different than they are with most people, and as mentioned previously other friends said they had no issue with me. Regardless I don't want people to feel uncomfortable around me so I'm more than willing to adjust behavior as needed.



**It is apparent her complaints were handled unfairly** – Again – on March 31 when Lindsay and Sharon approached me, I asked why the complainant(s) never told me they were feeling this way. They said the complainants claimed they “tried to tell me” and that I should “read a book on active listening”. However in Willa's above statement she acknowledges she did not try to tell me. I do not know if Willa misinformed her employers or if they misinformed me.

**Willa's behavior indicates she did not feel violated by me “for months”;** it shows the opposite – Willa and I were regularly in contact through text messages. We organized and volunteered at community activities together, and gardened together at times. She never indicated to me that she felt uncomfortable with any part of our communications. In fact she showed the opposite.

The following are text messages Willa sent to me within two weeks of when I was kicked off the property.

**Possible misunderstanding?** On March 16 when I asked if she wanted to help in the garden she told me she was “having a rough time mentally” and felt “burnt out”, but also indicated she wanted to stay involved. I may have misunderstood when she said she was “hoping to get a day off” – usually on her days off she liked to garden, but perhaps this time she meant for herself.

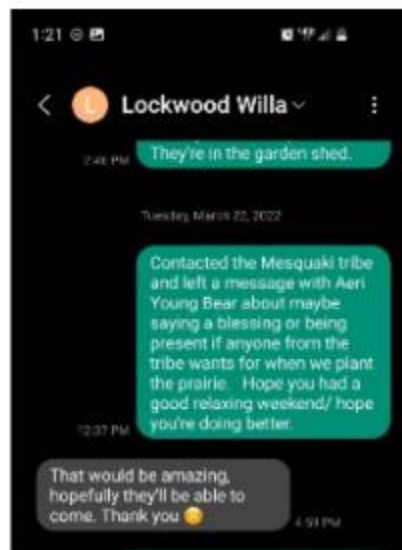
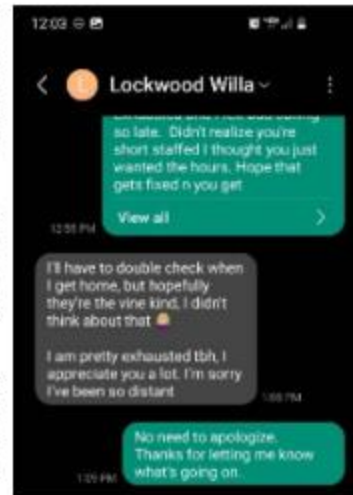


**Willa indicated we were friends: not that she felt “violated”** – When I responded to her previous text (including asking what types of cucumbers she had – which explains her response), she went above and beyond responding to my question and added “I appreciate you a lot. I’m sorry I’ve been so distant.” *How could I have known she felt uncomfortable?*

I responded with the following (lower right) trying to be a supportive friend reminding her of good times, and sent her Lyndsay’s Venmo info which we had talked about because she and I pitched in toward the cost of the seeds. Her response was “Love you <3”.

The vast majority of my interactions with Willa have been about the garden or prairie because again she was who I was first instructed by Lockwood to work with, and she had always been excited about the projects, giving her perspective and contributing regularly.

One of my final interactions with her prior to being confronted by Sharon and Lyndsay is shown below. I gave her an update on the prairie situation because I knew she was also excited about it including wanting to help purchase the seeds. Again her response shows she did not appear to feel “violated” or like I was “crossing boundaries” of which I was unfairly accused.



**Who is at fault** – While I think it is very important for young women (and people in general) to ask for help if they feel their personal boundaries are being crossed, it is also important that elders help them learn how to safely and effectively establish boundaries through encouraging simple, straightforward communication. Sharon and Lyndsay's responses to receiving complaints were not only unfair – they were injurious and felt personal. Why they chose to hurt me really badly on Transgender Day of Visibility based on typical prejudices people have against transgender women pretty much ruins that day for me. I've suffered great emotional distress while cut off from my community as a result of their actions, and the organization I own also has its reputation in question.

I do not know who the other party or parties were who complained about me – or if another party *did* in fact complain about me – but it sounds like a similar situation: someone “felt” a certain way around me (presumably based on their feelings and not my actions), then complained about me. Looking back I cannot think of a single instance where I violated anyone's space, including Willa's, but I assure you I was ever told anything I would have backed off immediately and stopped doing whatever she or others didn't feel comfortable with. I was not given that opportunity or respect.

**Actions the organization took against me –**

- **discipline** – I was told to leave the property and not return.
- **denied accommodation** – I am no longer allowed accommodations from the businesses.
- **denied service** – I am no longer allowed service by the businesses.
- **failure to train** – instead of training me to communicate in a different manner that would work better for complainant(s), they did not train me at all. Instead they punished me for communicating with employees via the forum I was directed to communicate to them with.
- **unequal treatment** – a female who complained was believed and I was treated like a predator based on typical prejudices people have against transgender women, “men invading womens' spaces”.

**Bases for their actions** – although I do not know if it was any one of the following, I strongly believe it was at least one of the following and probably a combination:

- **sex** – a non-transgender woman who complained about me was given preferential treatment during the investigation, with a presumption of guilt against me. Complainant was believed and I was not even asked about any incidents or interactions.
- **gender identity** – I was treated unfairly in their investigation of the complaints, with a presumption of guilt based on typical prejudices many transgender women face.

**Conclusion:** I have worked diligently, volunteering countless hours for Reliable and Lockwood. When leaving the situation I would have strongly preferred to have photos of before and after the garden and prairie restoration. Such photos would help build my portfolio so I could show other land owners what I am capable of doing and perhaps find work. Instead I leave empty-handed, my reputation and my business's reputations slandered: "I was asked to leave because women complained I made them feel unsafe and I was violating their space." I have been severely harmed by the businesses unfair and discriminatory practices.

**To resolve this matter, I would like:**

- Lockwood Cafe, Love Club LLC, and Reliable Street, Inc ought establish fair protocol for handling complaints.
- a settlement to reimburse me for my labor and emotional distress.
- a written letter of apology.

---

**Does the Iowa Civil Rights Act have jurisdiction?**

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission is a neutral, fact-finding law enforcement agency that enforces the "Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1965," Iowa's anti-discrimination law.

The "Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1965" prohibits discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, credit, public accommodations and education. Discrimination, or different treatment, is illegal if based on... sex, sexual orientation, [or][ gender identity....<sup>1</sup>

**LOVE CLUB LLC used me as unpaid labor without my knowledge or consent:**

When I accepted the management position for the garden, I was made aware of two organizations on the property:

1. Lockwood Cafe, a for-profit business, and
2. Reliable Street, Inc, a 501c3 non-profit.

While Lockwood is primarily run by Sharon and Austin Stewart, Reliable is primarily run by Lyndsay Nissen. I was told that "Lindsay owns the property", so she had the final say on whatever happened on the property. I was offered 50% discounts on all purchases from Lockwood, but as far as I knew I was volunteering my time and energy on behalf of Reliable.

It was not until late March 2022 that I became aware there may be a third organization involved, but I was not told to what extent. I found this out because on Feb. 21 I forwarded an Iowa Sales/Use/Excise Tax Exemption Certificate to Lyndsay for use in purchasing the prairie seeds. When I saw her in person a days later she informed me that she probably couldn't order the seeds through Reliable Street because the garden and prairie may be outside the scope of

<sup>1</sup> "About Us." *Iowa Civil Rights Commission*, <https://icrc.iowa.gov/about-us>.

the 501c3, "I can just order them through the LLC instead," she said. I still did not know what she meant until after I was removed from the property, at which time I looked up on the County Assessor's website to see who owned the property at which time I learned it is owned by LOVE CLUB LLC.

### **LOVE CLUB LLC violated the Fair Labor Standards Act:**

#### **Step 1: Understand the Definition of an Employee**

An employee is a worker who performs services for the employer, and the employer controls how and what the employee will do. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) defines the term "employ" to include "to suffer or permit to work" for an employer. Employees must be paid at least minimum wage and receive overtime for any hours over 40 in the workweek unless otherwise exempt under federal law.

#### **Step 2: Understand the Definition of a Volunteer**

A volunteer donates his or her time and energy without receiving financial or material gain. Guidelines exist for volunteers in the public and nonprofit sectors in which payment of minimum wage or overtime would not be necessary. The individual would need to a) work toward public service, religious or humanitarian objectives; b) not expect or receive compensation for services; and c) not displace any genuine employees. **Under FLSA regulations, an individual cannot volunteer services to a private, for-profit company.**

#### **Step 3: Comply with State and Federal Laws**

**There are no general regulations that permit volunteering of services to an employer in the private sector. All hours worked must be paid. According to the FLSA, an employer must pay all employees not less than the minimum wage for all hours worked. The FLSA regulation 29 C.F.R. §785.44 states that time spent in work for public or charitable purposes at the employer's request, or under the employer's direction or control, or while the employee is required to be on premises, is working time. The Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) states that employees cannot volunteer to do the same type of work that they perform as a part of their normal work duties and that the hours must be included in calculating hours worked. Time spent voluntarily engaged in civic, charitable or humanitarian activities that are completely different from the employee's normal work duties and outside of the employee's normal working hours would not be considered work time. In addition, an individual would need to volunteer without any coercion or undue pressure. The DOL has provided this direction regarding volunteers in several opinion letters.<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>2</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. "How to Determine If an Individual Is a Volunteer or an Employee." *SHRM*, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 2014, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/how-to-guides/pages/volunteeoranemployee.aspx>.

### **Section 3 (Exhibits A-4 — A-5): Statements and Documents Sent by Stewart and Nissen to the ICRC on or around May 1 through July 30, 2022.**

This section contains statements and supporting documents submitted by Defendants to the ICRC during the agency's initial ("Tier One") investigation phase. Specifically:

- Documents submitted by Defendant Nissen are included in **Exhibit C**.
- Additional documents, believed to have been prepared by Defendants Colville and Martinez and transmitted to ICRC by Defendant Stewart, are included in **Exhibits D and E**.
- Defendant Esker's statement is contained in **Exhibit E**.

Plaintiff alleges that these statements and documents were reviewed, relied upon, summarized, incorporated into, and republished through the ICRC's Preliminary Case Review and administrative closure process, and formed part of the basis for the agency's decision to administratively close the complaint without proceeding to a Tier Two investigation.

#### **ICRC Screening Process**

As part of its initial review process, the ICRC issues written questionnaires to both complainants and respondents pursuant to Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) 161-3.26, implementing Iowa Code Chapter 216. These questionnaires are designed to elicit position statements, supporting evidence, and factual representations. The responses are used to conduct the **Tier One investigation** — the preliminary screening phase to determine whether further investigation is warranted.

##### **1. Collection of Responses:**

After receiving questionnaire responses, an ICRC investigator conducts a Tier One screening to determine whether the complaint should advance to further investigation. This screening is typically completed within 120 days of filing.

##### **2. Screening Outcomes:**

- **Screened Out:** If the complaint is screened out, it is **administratively closed**. Complainants may request reconsideration of this determination.
- **Screened In:** If the complaint is screened in, the Commission may offer voluntary mediation to the parties.

##### **3. Investigation and Determination (Tier Two):**

If mediation fails or is declined, the Commission conducts a more detailed investigation. Following this, an administrative law judge (ALJ) issues a determination of "**probable cause**" or "**no probable cause**" based on the findings.

The Commission's Tier One screening determination reviewed and referenced representations and statements made by Defendants during this period.

Plaintiff alleges that those misrepresentations **materially influenced the agency's decision** to administratively close the case without advancing to Tier Two.

---

*Exhibit A-4 — Stewart's unabridged statement to ICRC (on or around May 1 through July 30, 2022)*

---

11. Sondra began to regularly come to Lockwood Cafe late summer of 2021. She was always very happy to be in the space and expressed she wanted to build community connection. The first day we spoke at any length we spoke about the community garden and she expressed interest in reaching out to potentially help and a passion for prairie. The community garden is not a part of Lockwood Cafe, and rather it is a part of the non profit, Reliable Street Inc. However Lockwood does use the compost site for food waste and has been since Lockwood Cafe opened in October of 2019. Upon meeting Sondra it was apparent that she was very eager to help. However, because of my work load, owning and managing the cafe, I did not have time to help in the garden. Additionally, I quickly realized she was what I would consider an over-communicator. I have learned from previous experience that the best way to signal that I can't communicate at such a high volume is to simply not respond so I backed away from communication.

As a regular she began to build friendships with a few of the individuals who work at Lockwood Cafe, including myself. Two individuals in particular had similar interests including gardening

and they began to volunteer with garden. As time went by the amount of her communication, the way that she communicated and the amount of time she spent in the cafe during their shifts increased. In late February, Denise mentioned to me that she felt unheard and disrespected as well as overwhelmed by the volume of texts and communication coming from Sondra. I mentioned this to Lyndsay and she had a conversation with Sondra to encourage her to be an active listener and respect personal boundaries.

On March 29<sup>th</sup>, Sondra came into Lockwood Cafe and asked if we could talk. In our conversation she brought up that she had spent \$400 on the garden and wanted to brainstorm ways to recover some of those costs. I explained that she should never spend any money without prior communication on who will be reimbursing her or to see if Reliable Street can get it donated or consider a different option. It was at this point I proposed a meeting between Lyndsay, Sondra, and I to discuss the garden space.

Shortly thereafter, Willa spoke with me about feeling harassed by Sondra and didn't know what to do but wanted to talk about it with me. Lyndsay, Denise, Willa, and I sat down for a conversation so we (Lyndsay and I) could better understand what was happening and discuss how to move forward. It was in this conversation that new information relating to how Denise and Willa were being treated that I became concerned for their health and well being while working in my business. I absolutely want to provide a safe space for customers that come to Lockwood, but providing a safe space for the employees of Lockwood is also vital.

Denise spoke about the passive and direct racism she had experienced from Sondra as well as pulling away from all of the garden conversations because of how much Sondra was communicating. The most recent conversation where Denise was made uncomfortable was when Sondra asked for money to help with the costs of gardening materials. Denise said she was made to feel bad for not providing financial assistance. Additionally Denise was concerned for the highschool students involved in SHEPH (Students Helping to End Poverty and Hunger) as Sondra was also soliciting funding from them as well and her communication on a shared platform was overwhelming to everyone involved. We did not reach out to SHEPH students because we were not looking for more "dirt" on Sondra and by having a conversation with them it could potentially harm Sondra's reputation.

Willa spoke about how Sondra was affecting her health. She was overwhelmed with the communication. She didn't want to hurt Sondra, but she also felt trapped. She explained that she didn't want to come to work, because Sondra came in on her shifts and would wait until she could corner Willa and have her attention. Willa also opened up and told us that early on in her friendship with Sondra, she had asked Willa out. Willa explained to Sondra that she was in a relationship and was not interested in a romantic relationship but happy to be friends. As time went on, Willa began to be overwhelmed by the attention and amount of communication from Sondra but did not know how to approach it. I have spoken with others who were in abusive relationships and all of Willa's body language was that of someone in an abusive relationship. Willa said that Sondra had recently sent her a link to a social media profile that was pornographic in nature and then questioned her if she had seen it and what she thought. She didn't want to be a part of the garden any longer, she was fearful of coming to work, and she didn't want to be forced to have a conversation with Sondra. Additionally Denise said she also no longer wanted to be a part of the community garden because of how Sondra had

communicated and the unwillingness to consider outside input. When we asked what outcome they would like to see, they both expressed that they would like her to no longer be in the space.

When we were made aware of Sondra's behavior and actions in relationship to Willa and Denise, it was decided by Lyndsay and I that at this point in time that to continue to provide a safe space we needed to ask her to no longer be involved. This decision was made not just because of what Denise and Willa said, but in combination with Sondra's other behaviors in the space. It seemed pertinent to communicate with Sondra as soon as possible. She and I had already had a meeting planned to discuss garden spending and talk about how to better communicate after she had approached both me and my husband seeking financial assistance for purchases she made relating to the prairie she wanted to plant. Lyndsay and I decided that we needed to talk with her in person and at the meeting that happened to be set for the following day. In the meantime I told Willa that if Sondra came in, she could do work in the back and that she did not need to engage with Sondra in any way.

I decided the responsible thing to do was protect them from harassment by asking Sondra to no longer be in the space. But I also felt the need to protect their privacy for fear that Sondra might further harass Lockwood employees. Neither Denise nor Willa wanted any further communication with Sondra.

Our conversation with Sondra was intentionally vague in terms of who spoke to us. While others had brought up concern over Sondra's behaviors, we decided the conversation we had with Willa and Denise was enough to make the decision and we did not want to bring anyone else into further conversation as it could potentially damage her reputation. Both Denise and Willa were concerned that if she knew it was them who said something, Sondra would slander their names and potentially harass them further. Sondra was adamant that she should know who said what. At the end of our conversation she said that she would not communicate with either of us any further. Days later I received the attached letter and a facebook message telling me that she had sent a letter. Additionally she continued to communicate with Lyndsay.

After our conversation with Sondra neither Lyndsay nor I reached out to anyone to share what happened as we believed it should stay between the involved parties and not become part of a community dialog or turn into unproductive gossip. We hoped that by not saying anything, she would have the opportunity to grow and find other avenues of community connection and involvement. We were not trying to cause harm to Sondra, rather to maintain the safety of the spaces we are responsible for. However in the following days, numerous individuals reached out to us to inquire what had transpired because Sondra reached out to them asking if they said anything. She was clearly on a mission to find out who had said something to us. We did not slander her name or speak poorly to anyone about her. Even close friends were not told about what transpired as can be seen by the texts messages attached as well as the text messages she attached in her complaint. When she told people her version of events, no one had heard of what happened. Both Denise and Willa did not even tell co-workers, and it was agreed that we would not talk about what had happened to maintain the privacy of all involved parties. As time went on more and more friends and community members reached out to either Lyndsay or myself inquiring what had happened because Sondra had reached out to them. At some point Willa did respond to Sondra as she wanted her to stop messaging her. Willa acknowledged that she was one of the individuals that said something, attached are the messages Willa sent to Sondra. Sondra then began to slander Willa's name within the community.

This exhibit contains the **full, unabridged statement** submitted by Defendant Nissen to the Iowa ICRC during the agency’s initial investigation period. Excerpts from this statement, along with related documents and contextual evidence, appear in Exhibits B, C, D, and E.

The unabridged statement is included here for purposes of **establishing chronology, providing evidentiary context**, and ensuring **full transparency of the materials relied upon by the agency** in making its determination.

14) First, since I have only known Alexandra as Sondra, I will refer to her as her name she presented to us. Sondra first appeared to me at the Open Mic I host every Tuesday. She is a musician so I was very encouraging to have her continue to come to that event. She was an immediate fixture, showing up early, wanting to help with the event and taking on other unsolicited responsibilities. For example, she created a flier for the Open Mic to hang around town without me asking or even asking me if I wanted that. Yet I am always grateful for people to help with it because it’s a free event and therefore it does not create any capital. I run it every week and do not pay myself and have no employees. She seemed in desperate need of a community and we welcomed her with open arms. Unfortunately being that welcoming sometimes has consequences.

Sondra soon became almost a daily presence. Since Lockwood Cafe is a tenant of the space, she had 8am-3pm access to the indoor space and 24 hour access to the outdoor space. Her residence is three blocks away, so she was around constantly. She began to find more unsolicited projects and responsibilities as time went on.

Her initial interest was in our community garden on the property. Reliable Street INC is the non-profit organization that is a tenant of The Love Club LLC. The mission is to provide community improvement through the arts. So the garden has been one of the many projects led by different volunteers to fulfill the mission. We have several volunteers, including an Ames High School club called SHEPH (Students Helping End Poverty and Hunger) who have taken on the garden in the past two years. Sondra continuously would corner me if she saw me at Lockwood, in the gallery, or in the yard to talk about her ideas for the garden. She would always talk about how she’s never had access to land and how this opportunity would make her life so fulfilled. I wanted to give her that opportunity but had to explain over and over that these other people had a plan and she would need to work it out with them.

Pretty soon she came up with the idea of a prairie she has always wanted to do. She drew up a proposal that was not discussed with any of the other parties involved. It had prairie in places that were meant to be garden space. I told her again, she needed to talk to everyone. She began clearing the space of the weeds that had grown last year and prepping the area with no one asking her to. This prairie was her dream and she was obsessive about it. Finally it got to the point where I was so tired of having the same conversation with her, I just said fine, she could do her prairie.

Once Sondra had permission for her prairie, she continued to push for more control over the entire garden project. I did my best to try to make her understand she needed to listen to all the involved parties. Unfortunately she bulldozed those people with her ideas instead. She did not listen to others. She over communicated, flooding people with emails and links in a Discord forum, texting more than several messages before people responded, sending messages in the middle of the night. The other volunteers started expressing their concerns then.

I believe it was in February when I sat down with her and made my final attempt to get her to listen to people. I encouraged her to read about active listening. I tried to explain that people felt unheard, like their ideas weren't valid and that she made them feel like they didn't know anything. When you're working with volunteers, stuff like that makes them quit. She was defensive and did not seem to grasp her overbearing style. She did at that point thank me for trying to help her. I was hopeful that I may have gotten through at least a little bit.

So at this point, we had donated the use of the land for her prairie dream, which she was going to raise money for to buy the seed. Well, she never raised all the money and began soliciting it from the non-profit and anyone she could ask. Because the prairie was not a community oriented project, we did not feel that it was in line with the mission.

This March she began doing other unsolicited things such as making a plan for a rain barrel system. The SHEPH group has a small amount of funding from the school. Sondra assumed that she could use this money for that project and a few other garden items. So instead of asking the students or their teacher, she went ahead and spent \$300. She then approached the students to get money to pay for the items. They informed her that they have to approve all their purchases before they buy anything. So Sondra's purchases could not be paid for by their club. When she found this news out she began complaining to everyone about it. I told her I was sorry but there was nothing I could do. I was extremely frustrated because I had been consistently telling her to communicate. She then proceeded to ask everyone for money. Everyone involved with the garden, Lockwood Cafe employees, customers, people who come to events. It was becoming very uncomfortable for so many people.

Shortly after this, the big complaints against her came out. The statement from Lockwood Cafe explains this in greater detail. Since I do not work at Lockwood, the employees took their concerns to Sharon Stewart, the cafe owner first. Sharon informed me of the situation and we had a meeting with two employees. The employee expressed that after being sick with pneumonia for a few weeks, she realized she no longer wanted to come to work. Sondra had become quite frankly obsessed with this woman. Coming into the cafe during every shift the woman had, constantly cornering her to talk about Sondra's personal issues and projects. The employee stated that she had started watching for Sondra and if she saw her coming, she would hide in the kitchen until Sondra left. She texted, emailed, anyway she could contact this woman constantly. We had no idea the extent to which Sondra had been stalking and harassing her. I fortunately was in a position where I could actually just walk away from Sondra. I could turn the other direction and leave if I didn't want to talk to her. This employee did not have that luxury.

The other employee did not have the same obsessive experience with Sondra, but felt uncomfortable for other reasons. The employee recounted several occasions where Sondra made racist comments. She felt Sondra invalidated her opinions on the garden. Also that Sondra made inappropriate comments on the employees sexual identity.

At the conclusion of this meeting Sharon and I asked the employees what they needed to feel safe and comfortable again on the property and at work. They both agreed that they felt Sondra should no longer be involved or come to the cafe or events. Being a safe place and community leaders, we have to sometimes exclude a person if they are creating big enough problems that make others decide they can no longer be in the space. It was not a decision we made lightly.

So Sharon and I made the decision to ask Sondra to leave the projects and the space. We met with her on March 31, 2022. We did our best to not hurt her feelings and also to protect the employees that spoke to us. So our explanation was rather broad. Basically we told her that people had finally expressed their inability to handle her behavior. That she had not respected peoples boundaries, personal space, work time, opinions, and had not listened to them. I told her my best advice was to really try to learn about boundaries and active listening. She was extremely defensive. She questioned us to figure out who said something. She had zero personal reflection and took no responsibility. I gave her \$300 in cash for the money she spent without asking, just to be kind. You can see the \$400 ATM withdrawal on my personal bank statement on that date in the documents. I gave her the prairie seed I paid for as well and said goodbye.

So in conclusion, Sondra was never an employee of Reliable Street INC. We have zero employees. She was a volunteer for the non-profit garden and given free access to my land to do her dream project. In the definition of an employee the employer controls how and what the employee will do. She was controlling the entire situation. We never asked for a prairie. Everything Sondra did was on her own accord. We've never hired anyone to work on the landscape. Everything we do is community, is volunteer work and is donated for the yard and garden. You will see in the supporting documents that she understood. She wound up with the prairie seed. It was never planted.

#### **Section 4 (Exhibits A-6 and A-7): ICRC Administrative Closure and Preliminary Case Review (August 3, 2022)**

This section contains the ICRC's letter dated **August 3, 2022**, formally notifying Plaintiff of the agency's decision to administratively close her complaint. The letter reflects that the Commission's determination was based on statements and documentation submitted by Defendants during the Tier One investigation phase.

The section also includes key excerpts from the ICRC's investigative file showing that the agency relied on **Defendants' position statements and accompanying materials** in reaching its determination. Plaintiff asserts that several of these statements and documents contained **materially false or misleading representations**, which substantially influenced the agency's decision to close the matter without advancing to Tier Two investigation.

These exhibits are submitted to demonstrate (1) the **basis of the administrative closure**, (2) the **procedural posture of the case at the time of closure**, and (3) Plaintiff's grounds for judicial review of the agency's reliance on inaccurate information.



STATE OF IOWA

KIM REYNOLDS, GOVERNOR  
ADAM GREGG, LT. GOVERNOR

STAN THOMPSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

8/3/2022

ALEXANDRA DISTANCE MARIE WILSON  
4733 TORONTO STREET  
APT 112  
AMES, IA 50014

RE: CP# 04-22-78265 EEOC# 26A-2022-00580  
ALEXANDRA DISTANCE MARIE WILSON v. LOVE  
CLUB LLC

ALEXANDRA DISTANCE MARIE WILSON:

Your complaint has been administratively closed. The Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) will take no further action on this case. Enclosed is a copy of the Preliminary Screening Review. Determinations at this stage are based primarily on paper filings and documentation provided to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC).

At this time, you have the following legal options:

1. You may request the ICRC reconsider this determination and reopen your complaint. Your request must be in writing and made within thirty (30) days from the date of this letter. Your request should state why reopening should be granted. Any new information or documents supporting your allegations of discrimination should be submitted along with your request for reconsideration and reopening. The ICRC will send a copy of your request to the Respondent, who will then be given an opportunity to submit a response. In your written request for reconsideration, please state the CP# and EEOC#.

Your request can be delivered to the ICRC office within 30 days from the date of this letter by one of the following methods:

- a. Mail – postmarked no later than the 30<sup>th</sup> day, see address at bottom.
- b. FAX – received by the ICRC no later than 4:30 pm on the 30<sup>th</sup> day, see FAX number at bottom.
- c. Hand-delivered – received by the ICRC no later than 4:30 pm on the 30<sup>th</sup> day, see address at bottom.
- d. Email - received by the ICRC no later than 4:30 pm on the 30<sup>th</sup> day, see email address at bottom.

**Note:** If the 30<sup>th</sup> day falls on a weekend or a federal or state holiday, the 30-day period is extended to the ICRC's next regular business day.

2. You may request a letter granting you the right to sue in State District Court. Please read the enclosed Information Sheet regarding Right-to-Sue letters. We suggest consulting an attorney before you choose this option. You may wish to contact the Iowa Bar Association's Lawyer Referral Service at 1-(800) 457-3729. Both parties have the right to request a copy of the ICRC's case file after the Right-to-Sue letter has been issued. Please be aware there is a charge for the copying.

**Note:** In your written request for a Right-to-Sue letter, please state the CP# and EEOC#.

If you have any questions, please contact our office.

Sincerely,  
Iowa Civil Rights Commission

Enclosures: Preliminary Screening Review and RTS Information Sheet  
CC: File

Please help us improve our complaint process by completing a short evaluation at  
<https://icrc.iowa.gov/file-complaint/complaint-process-evaluation>.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Grimes State Office Building, 400 E. 14<sup>th</sup> St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0201  
515-281-4121 / 1-800-457-4416 / Fax 515-242-5840 / [icrc@iowa.gov](mailto:icrc@iowa.gov)



IOWA CIVIL RIGHTS  
COMMISSION

STATE OF IOWA

KIM REYNOLDS, GOVERNOR  
ADAM GREGG, LT. GOVERNOR

STAN THOMPSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

8/3/2022

LOVE CLUB LLC  
4625 RELIABLE STREET  
AMES, IA 50014

RE: CP# 04-22-78265 IEOC# 26.A-2022-00580  
ALEXANDRA DISTANCE MARIE WILSON v.  
LOVE CLUB LLC

LOVE CLUB LLC:

The above captioned complaint has been administratively closed effective the date of this letter. The Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) will take no further action on this case. Enclosed is a copy of the Preliminary Screening Review. Determinations at this stage are primarily based on paper filings and documentation provided to the ICRC. The Complainant does have the following legal options:

1. To request the ICRC reconsider this determination and reopen the complaint.
  - a. The request must be made within thirty (30) days from the date of this letter. Should the request for reconsideration be made, you may receive a copy of the request.
2. To request a letter granting the Complainant the right to sue Respondent in State District Court.
  - a. The Complainant must request the letter within two (2) years of the date of this letter.
  - b. Both parties have the right to request a copy of the ICRC's case file after the Right-to-Sue letter has been issued. Please be aware there is a charge for the copying.
3. To request a review by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) if the case is cross-filed with that agency.

If you have any questions, please contact our office. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,  
Iowa Civil Rights Commission

Enclosure: Preliminary Screening Review

CC: File  
RELIABLE STREET INC  
LOCKWOOD CAFE

Please help us improve our complaint process by completing a short evaluation at  
<https://icrc.iowa.gov/file-complaint/complaint-process-evaluation>.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Grimes State Office Building, 400 E. 14<sup>th</sup> St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0201  
515-281-4121 / 1-800-457-4416 / Fax 515-242-5840 / [icrc@iowa.gov](mailto:icrc@iowa.gov)

ICRC's Letter of Administrative Closure (A-6) — page 2 of 2.

-----

This exhibit contains **selected excerpts** from the ICRC’s **Preliminary Case Review** letter dated **August 3, 2022**, concerning Plaintiff’s complaint against Defendants. These excerpts have been selected because they:

1. **Highlight the jurisdictional limitations** of the ICRC, including its exclusion of **Love Club LLC** despite evidence of its direct involvement in — and benefit from — Plaintiff’s labor;
2. **Demonstrate the agency’s reliance on Defendants’ contested statements and accompanying documents** in deciding whether to pursue further investigation or close the case; and
3. **Establish procedural context** supporting Plaintiff’s pursuit of judicial review following exhaustion of administrative remedies.

The full **seven-page determination letter** is preserved and available for judicial review or submission upon request. These excerpts are provided to **focus the Court’s attention** on the issues central to this appeal: jurisdictional determinations, identification of responsible parties, and reliance on materially disputed representations by Defendants.

**PRELIMINARY CASE REVIEW**

**CP #** 04-22-78265

**EEOC #** 26A-2022-00580

**Area:** Public Accommodation, Employment\*

**Bases:** Sex, Gender Identity

**Complainant:** Alexandra Distance Marie Wilson

**Respondents:** Love Club, LLC; Reliable Street, Inc.; Lockwood Cafe

---

**Adverse Action:** Denied Service

**Date:** March 31, 2022

\*Note: Complainant indicated Unequal Treatment, and this will be analyzed as Denied Service. Complainant indicated Employment adverse actions including: Discipline, Failure to Hire, Failure to Train, Denied Accommodation or Modification, and Termination, on her complaint. Based on her narrative and her questionnaire responses, Complainant was not an employee of Respondents, and thus the area of Employment will not be analyzed.

---

- Complainant's statement, including photos of gardens

## RESPONDENT'S REASONS

### Relevant Factual Allegations:

Stewart owns Respondent Lockwood Café, a small restaurant which seeks to be a space that remains safe for the Queer and Trans community as well as POC. Stewart states over half of her staff identifies as Queer, and while there are not currently transgender employees, there were previously who have now moved out of the state.

Stewart states Complainant began to come to the café regularly in the late summer 2021. Respondents note Complainant identified herself by the name of Sondra, and she spoke openly about being transgender. Complainant seemed happy and wanted to build a community connection, and she expressed an interest in the community garden and prairie. Stewart states the garden is not part of the café, but is part of the Reliable Street, Inc. non-profit.

Nissen states Complainant first appear to her at an open mic night at the Reliable Street, Inc. gallery, and then she became a fixture there. Nissen alleges Complainant needed community, and they embraced her. Nissen states Complainant became interested in the community garden that was part of Reliable Street, Inc. Nissen notes Reliable Street Inc. is a non-profit organization and a collective space, whose mission is to provide community improvement through the arts. They encourage a working environment, both interdependent and collaborative, and they intend for the public to be involved. Reliable is a tenant of The Love Club LLC. Nissen says the garden is a volunteer project that incorporates high school students in a club called SHEPH.

Nissen alleges Complainant would corner her regularly to talk about the garden and her ideas for it. Nissen states she told Complainant that yes, she could have the opportunity to work on the land, but that the others already involved had a plan. Complainant soon came up with the idea of a prairie, and Nissen encouraged her to talk to the other involved parties who already worked on the garden project. Regardless, Nissen states Complainant began to clear the weeds from the space she wanted to work in without talking to anyone else about it, and the prairie became an obsession. Nissen says she agreed Complainant could plant a prairie, and Complainant continued to push her for more control of the project. Nissen alleges Complainant did not listen to others, she bulldozed them, and Nissen states she continued to attempt to get Complainant to listen to other people. Nissen states Complainant wanted to raise money to buy the seed for the prairie but never did, instead she asked Nissen and others for donations for it. Nissen notes the prairie was not the community project, the garden was.

Nissen recalls Complainant spent money on garden purchases without authorization, and then she began to solicit funds for them from café employees and customers, and others involved with the garden, which became very uncomfortable. In addition, Nissen states Complainant had become "obsessed" with Colville, to the extent that Complainant was stalking and harassing her. When the Colville complained to Stewart, she and other employees such as Martinez shared that Complainant had also made racist comments and inappropriate comments about employees' sexual identities, and they provide text messages and statements from employees and patrons who express these sentiments and those communications.

Key Excerpts from ICRC's Preliminary Case Review (A-7) — page 2 of 4.

Complainant was denied service, as she was told by Stewart and Nissen she was banned indefinitely from Respondents, including the community garden project. Complainant was denied service, while she alleges males and non-transgender patrons and collaborators are allowed to enjoy them. Complainant alleges their conduct was based on her sex because a non-transgender woman who complained was given preferential treatment, and Complainant was presumed guilty. Complainant believes she was treated unfairly by this presumption of guilt based on typical prejudices many transgender women face, such as being a predator.

Respondent's Reason

Respondent provided legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason and supported with admissible evidence:

Yes       No

The establishment of a prima facie case creates a rebuttable presumption of discrimination. *McCullough v. Real Foods, Inc.*, 140 F.3d 1123, 1126 (8th Cir. 1998). Once a prima facie case is established, the burden shifts to Respondent to articulate some legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason for the challenged action. *Valline*, 2003 WL 21361344, at \*3 (citing *Bd. of Supervisors of Buchanan Cnty. v. Iowa Civil Rights Comm'n*, 584 N.W.2d 252, 256 (Iowa 1998)). The reason must be articulated with some specificity and clarity in order to afford Complainant "a full and fair opportunity to demonstrate pretext." *Burdine*, 450 U.S. at 255–56.

This burden involves the production of some admissible evidence giving rise to a genuine issue of fact. *Hamilton v. First Baptist Elderly Housing Found.* 436 N.W.2d 336, 338 (Iowa 1989). The supporting evidence does not need to be enough to persuade a court that the proffered reason was the actual motivation. *Id.* Attorney arguments are not considered admissible evidence. *State v. Graves*, 668 N.W.2d 860, 878 (Iowa 2003); 8th Circuit Model Civil Jury Instructions 1.02(1); Iowa Model Jury Instruction 100.4.

Respondents state Complainant was a volunteer, not an employee. Nissen recalls Complainant began to solicit funds for the prairie from café employees and customers, and others involved with the garden. The situation became very uncomfortable, as there was a business being run, and employees were there to work and customers were there to be patrons of the business. Respondents

state Complainant was stalking and harassing an employee, and she and other employees shared that Complainant had also made racist comments and inappropriate comments about employees' sexual identities and national origin. They provide text messages and statements from employees and patrons who express these sentiments and those communications. The patron alleges Complainant harassed him by texting and calling him and numerous others in the community, multiple times a day.

Nissen states she and Stewart asked the employees what they needed to feel safe and comfortable at work and on the property, and the employees agreed Complainant should no longer be involved.

No further investigation is warranted.

**MATERIAL DISPUTED FACTS**

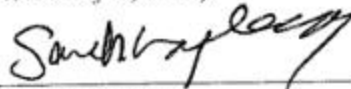
Yes       No

**MATERIAL CREDIBILITY DETERMINATIONS TO BE MADE**

Yes       No

---

**RECOMMENDATION**     Refer for Further Investigation     Administratively Close  
The ICRC's administrative rules provide the standard for screening. "A case will be screened in when further processing is warranted." Iowa Admin. Code r. 161—3.12(1)(f). "Further processing is warranted when the collected information indicates a reasonable possibility of a probable cause determination." *Id.* Probable cause exists where there are reasonable grounds to believe discrimination has occurred. *Wilson v. Hayes*, 464 N.W.2d 250, 261–62 (Iowa 1990) (citing 52 Am.Jur.2d *Malicious Prosecution* § 51, at 219).

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sarah Vanderploeg  
Civil Rights Specialist

Key Excerpts from ICRC's Preliminary Case Review (A-7) — page 4 of 4.

## Section 5 (Exhibits A-8): Plaintiff's Appeal to ICRC (September 3, 2022).

This section includes a copy of Plaintiff's appeal to the ICRC's letter of determination and preliminary case review.

### Procedural Background and Basis of Appeal

1. Plaintiff faced significant procedural prejudice in preparing her appeal due to both the **volume and character-based and adverse nature** of the statements submitted by Defendants to the ICRC. Plaintiff was provided a **30-day response period**, during which she was required to address a substantial number of **misleading claims and supporting documents**. In addition, the inflammatory nature of many of these allegations caused substantial procedural and practical impairment, which further impaired Plaintiff's ability to prepare a comprehensive, point-by-point rebuttal within the limited time allowed, exacerbating the procedural disadvantage already imposed by the 30-day response deadline. Given these combined factors, Plaintiff was unable to submit a fully developed appeal.

Prior to filing the appeal, Plaintiff formally requested access to **the underlying statements and documentary evidence submitted by Defendants Stewart, Nissen, and Esker**, which were referenced in the Commission's preliminary case review (see Exhibit A-7, p. 2, ¶5). The preliminary case review contained serious hearsay allegations regarding Plaintiff, including claims that she had made racist comments, inappropriate statements regarding employees' sexual identities, and allegations of stalking and harassment, as well as **text messages and statements from employees and patrons**.

The ICRC **denied Plaintiff's request**, citing agency policy prohibiting the release of the case file until a Right-to-Sue Letter has been issued. As a result, Plaintiff was **unable to review or rebut** the materials on which the Commission relied in making its determination.

2. **Had Plaintiff been granted access** to the statements and supporting materials (see Exhibits D and E), she could have **directly rebutted the allegedly false and misleading claims** at issue. Instead, Plaintiff's appeal was **constrained to challenging hearsay contained within the Commission's determination letter**, without access to the underlying evidence that the agency relied upon in reaching its decision.

Alexandra "Sondra" Wilson  
4733 Toronto St. #112  
Ames, IA 50014  
adwilson8@dmacc.edu

Iowa Civil Rights Commission  
State Office Building  
400 E. 14<sup>th</sup> St.  
Des Moines, IA 50319

**Request for Appeal CP #04-22-7265**

Dear Iowa Civil Rights Commission:

Although I am writing to request an appeal, my hopes for finding justice for this case have diminished as a result of the several false accusations and slanderous statements Nissen made in her response to the ICRC. I received a copy of these statements within the packet I received from ICRC on 8/3/2022, and I am appalled by and upset about her malicious dishonesty. I sincerely thought Love Club would simply settle because they knew what happened to me was wrong, and frankly I worked hard for them and accomplished a great deal during the months I worked there. However, instead their response, via Nissen, included the following false, slanderous accusations:

"Nissen alleges Complainant would come here regularly to talk about the garden and her ideas for it."

>>>> I never "cornered" Nissen to talk about the garden. She is the owner of the property. Mrs. Stewart (owner of Lockwood) frequently told me to "talk to Lyndsay (Nissen)" because she had "the final say" on anything property related. I approached Nissen to get permission at various times before making major changes so that she would not be disappointed with the results. Nissen *never* showed disinterest, annoyance, or otherwise when discussing the garden project. Rather, she often brought it up. I don't like how she now is attempting to frame these conversations as if I "cornered" her. That is ridiculous.

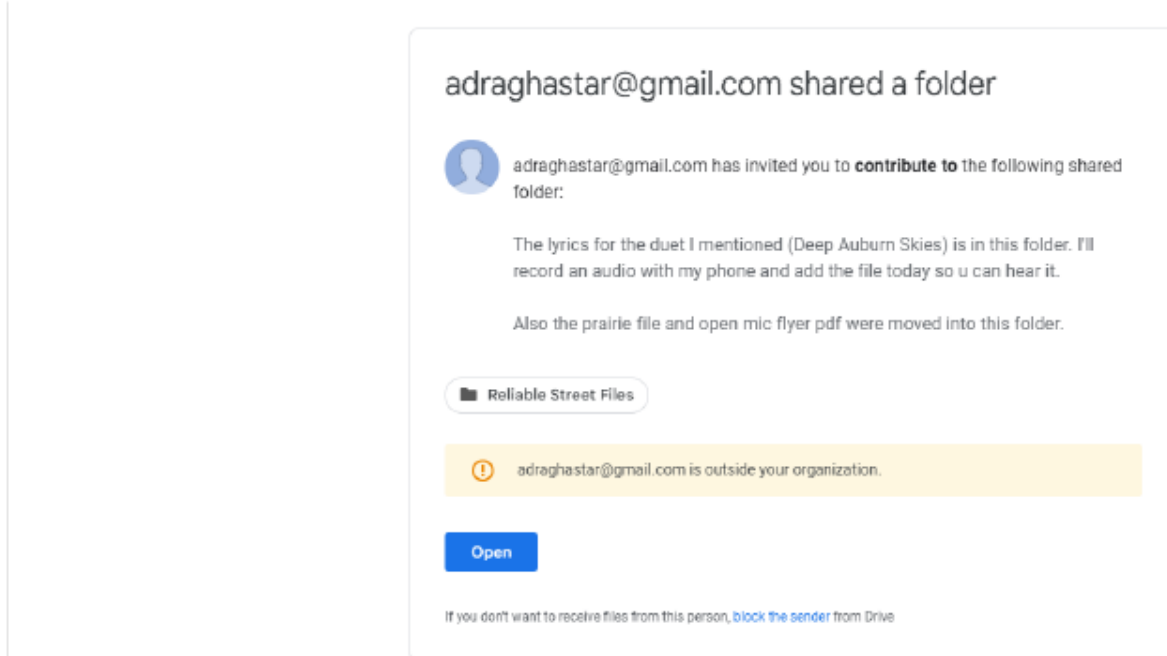
"Nissen states she told Complainant that yes, she could have the opportunity to work on the land, but that the others already involved had a plan. Complainant soon came up with the idea of a prairie, and Nissen encouraged her to talk to the other involved parties who already worked on the garden project. Regardless, Nissen states Complainant began to clear the weeds from the space she wanted to work in without talking to anyone else about it, and the prairie became an obsession."

>>>> Nissen and Stewart asked me to take lead the garden project, and to coordinate

Plaintiff's Appeal to the ICRC (A-8) — page 1 of 6.

with Lockwood Cafe employees Willa Colville and Denise Martinez, and SHEPH. They wanted me to take charge of the project because the high schoolers did not have time to perform many tasks which needed done. I suggested installing native tallgrass prairie to replace the tall weeds surrounding and encroaching into the garden, and on Oct. 22 I sent Nissen a proposal to install native tallgrass prairie; screenshot:

On Fri, Oct 22, 2021 at 12:47 PM Sondra Wilson (via Google Drive) <drive-shares-dm-noreply@google.com> wrote:



**Continued:** On Oct. 26 at the open mic Nissen approved the installation of the prairie, and on Oct. 31 I began clearing weeds. Nissen was aware that Luke Gran from Pruneterra had assessed the property for prairie installation. Nissen lied when she claimed that I “began to clear the weeds from the space she wanted to work in without talking to anyone else about it” and when she claimed that “the prairie became an obsession”. Nissen approved prairie installation, and she attempted to shine me in a negative light when claiming it “became an obsession”. I performed the labor we agreed upon, and approached her with ideas to get approval. How she now attempts to cast me in a negative light is disappointing, false, slanderous, and unfair.

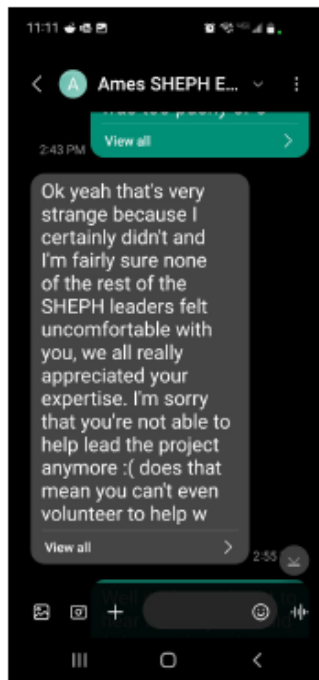
“Nissen says she agreed Complainant could plant a prairie, and Complainant continued to push her for more control of the project.”

>>>> Again Nissen attempts to cast shade on my character. What she said is absolutely false.

Plaintiff’s Appeal to the ICRC (A-8) — page 2 of 6.

“Nissen alleges Complainant did not listen to others, she bulldozed them, and Nissen states she continued to attempt to get Complainant to listen to other people.”

>>>> Nissen again is lying about my character and attempting to cast me into a negative light. I did not “bulldoze” anyone. For example, after Nissen removed me from the project and barred me from the property, I messaged SHEPH's president, Emily Hoag, with regard to what happened. You can tell by her response that students from SHEPH were not feeling “bulldozed” or as if I hadn't listened to them. Again Nissen is lying and attempting to cast shade on my character, and I am extremely disappointed in her.



“Nissen states Complainant wanted to raise money to buy the seed for the prairie but never did, instead she asked Nissen and others for donations for it.”

>>>> I asked Nissen and others if they had any ideas for raising some funds for it. I never asked anyone for money for the project. Again Nissen is lying.

“Nissen notes the prairie was not the community project, the garden was.”

>>>> Willa and Denise were both excited about working on the prairie together. Luke Gran and Nate Kemperman were also excited about it. SHEPH members were excited about it, and one member particularly was as she had written a paper about Iowa native prairie. While SHEPH did not have time to work on it, they were supportive and excited about it. Besides them, however, several community members donated time to help with the prairie. Although I proposed the idea, several people were involved. Again Nissen

is lying and attempting to cast me in a negative light.

“Nissen recalls Complainant spent money on garden purchases without authorization....”

>>>> I did not spend money on garden purchases without authorization. Nissen entrusted me with discretion with regard to improving the garden – she told me she was really impressed and happy with how the garden was looking after I installed 4x4s and wood chips which I purchased with my own money as donations to the project.. They were essential purchases because they were required by the City of Ames fire regulations for use in fire prevention throughout the prairie area. Again Nissen is lying. I feel used by her for my labor and kindness, and slandered by her repeated, manipulative lies which are aforementioned.

“[S]he began to solicit funds for them from café employees and customers, and others involved with the garden, which became very uncomfortable.”

>>>> Again Nissen is lying. I never asked any cafe employees or customers – or others involved with the garden – for money. Here is what happened: when I told Colville that I purchased the 4x4s and related supplies due to the urgency of the project (the prairie was scheduled to soon be planted, and the area needed to be brought to fire code), Colville told me that I should really talk to Lockwood owners and Lyndsay about making the purchases. Lockwood owners and I discussed the garden frequently because several of them were involved, so I asked if they had any suggestions for getting donations for additional supplies. I was directed to talk with Nissen about this because she owns the property (she owns Love Club and appears to the CEO of Reliable Street, Inc.) It was the very next day that Nissen banned me from the property and robbed me of several months labor while slandering my name throughout the community.

“Nissen states Complainant had become “obsessed” with Colville, to the extent that Complainant was stalking and harassing her.”

>>>> Again Nissen is lying. I never stalked nor harassed Colville, and the fact that she's lying about this is another example of how she is choosing to abuse me via trying to accuse me of something which is used as a typical stereotype against transgender women. Nissen has shown to me that she is an abusive, manipulative person.

“When the Colville complained to Stewart, she and other employees such as Martinez shared that Complainant had also made racist comments and inappropriate comments about employees’ sexual identities, and they provide text messages and statements from employees and patrons who express these sentiments and those communications.”

>>>> I never made racist comments nor did I make inappropriate comments about employees' sexual identities. I don't know what text messages or statements were taken out of context (or lied about) and submitted to you, but I am very against racism and sexism.

“One text message is a conversation between Complainant and an employee where Complainant wrongly identifies and asks questions about the employee’s national origin.

>>>> I need more context (not sure what text this is), however I am absolutely certain that if I was inquiring about someone's ancestry, it was because I'm a history nut. Whatever I texted to whoever this is about is absolutely taking it out of context in order to slander my reputation.

“In a statement, a patron alleges he witnessed Complainant make racially insensitive comments, and Complainant harassing staff at the café, including asking them, other patrons, and even the high school students in SHEPH for money for the garden projects.”

>>>> Whoever stated these things (assuming it is Willa Colville's best friend Charlie Esker) is absolutely lying. None of these things occurred. Again, I am very against racism and I never asked members of SHEPH, Lockwood staff, or patrons for money. SHEPH and I discussed fundraising ideas, but Esker was not present for these conversations and is lying. Esker displays sells his art and has a studio on the property where he works. However, here he pretends he's “a patron who witnessed this”. These people are complete jerks.

“The patron alleges Complainant harassed him by texting and calling him and numerous others in the community, multiple times a day.”

>>>> I texted people, and people texted back, but to now claim that I was harassing when we were having conversations they participated in is another lie. These people are evil.

“Nissen states Complainant was extremely defensive, did no personal reflection, and did not accept any responsibility.”

>>>> What I was being accused of never happened, so no I will not accept responsibility for that. More manipulative lying from Nissen here.

“Nissen notes she gave Complainant \$300 in cash for the money Complainant spent without asking....”

>>>> Nissen gave me money to reimburse me for the purchases I made the two weeks prior for the fire safety. I never asked her for this money. Again Nissen is being manipulative and false in her claims.

“Prairie seed, though Nissen also provides an email stating Complainant was purchasing the prairie seed as a donation.”

>>>> My boyfriend donated \$100 toward the prairie see purchase. Nissen said she would cover the rest. Anything she stated that doesn't align with this again is more manipulation.

In closing:

I really don't anticipate ICRC to take further action on this, however with Nissen, Esker, and others making abusive, false statements against me on the record, I felt it is necessary to file this appeal to refute their awful statements. I regret volunteering for them, and have learned in the future to always get a contract.

ICRC employees: thank you for your help in this matter. I really thought Nissen would just reimburse me for my time following the original filing – I had hoped for a mediator to be provided by ICRC, but I absolutely did not expect Nissen and related parties to file a string of lies and bullying within their statements. Now on your end it just probably looks like my word against theirs. I don't expect to find justice for how I was treated.

Sincerely,  
Sondra Wilson

## **Section 6 (Exhibit A-9): Plaintiff's Right-to-Sue Letter from the ICRC (September 6, 2023).**

This letter confirms that Plaintiff has exhausted all administrative remedies before the ICRC and has the legal right to initiate a civil action against Defendants.

### **Procedural Context**

1. After denying Plaintiff's appeal (see Exhibit A-8), the ICRC advised Plaintiff to retain legal counsel.
2. Plaintiff subsequently requested a copy of the case file to:
  - a. **Determine the substance and origin of the allegations** contained in Defendants' submissions — including claims of “stalking and harassment,” racism, and anti-LGBT+ comments — and whether such allegations were fabricated or retaliatory in nature; and
  - b. **Provide these materials to prospective counsel** in order to seek legal representation.
3. The ICRC denied this request, citing agency policy prohibiting the release of the case file until after a Right-to-Sue Letter has been issued. As a result, Plaintiff was **unable to access critical evidence** at the time she sought counsel.
4. Because Plaintiff did not have access to the statements, exhibits, and documents submitted to the Commission (see Exhibits D and E), **no attorney agreed to take her case**, with most citing a **lack of available evidence** as the basis for declining representation.

Exhibit A-9 — Plaintiff's Right-to-Sue Letter (September 6, 2023).

Administrative Release  
(Letter of Right-To-Sue)

To:	) From:
ALEXANDRA DISTANCE MARIE WILSON	)
4733 TORONTO STREET	) Iowa Civil Rights Commission
APT 112	) Grimes State Office Building
AMES, IA 50014	) 400 E. 14 <sup>th</sup> Street
	) Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Complaint CP# 04-22-78265      EEOC# 26A-2022-00580

This is your Administrative Release (Right-To-Sue) Letter issued pursuant to Iowa Code § 216.16 and 161 Iowa Administrative Code Section § 3.10. It is issued pursuant to your request.

The conditions precedent found in 161 Administrative Code § 3.10(2) have been met.

With this Right-To-Sue Letter, you have the right to commence an action in district court. That action must be commenced within ninety (90) days of the Right-To-Sue Letter issuance date, **9/6/2023**. The Right-To-Sue Letter is not a finding by the ICRC on the merits of the charge. The ICRC will take no further action in this matter.

A copy of the Right-To-Sue Letter has been sent to the Respondent(s) as shown below. The Administrative Rules allow any party to a complaint to request a copy of the file when a Right-to-Sue has been issued. The Administrative Rules allow any party to a complaint to request a copy of the file when a Right-to-Sue has been issued. If you or your attorney would like to obtain a copy of the file, please submit your request in writing via regular mail, fax, or email to [icrc@iowa.gov](mailto:icrc@iowa.gov). The copy and processing fees are as follows:

- Photocopy of investigative files - .25¢ per page; copies of digital recordings \$15.00 per electronic storage device (hard copy); actual cost of postage; search/supervisory fee \$26.00 per hour
- Scanned copy of investigative files - \$15.00 for first 150-page batch; \$10.00 for each 150-page batch thereafter; copies of digital recordings \$10.00 per electronic storage device (electronic copy); search/supervisory fee \$26.00 per hour

If you opt for an electronic copy, you must provide an email address in order to receive the copy.

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission  
Phone: (515) 281-4121  
FAX: (515) 242-5840  
Email: [icrc@iowa.gov](mailto:icrc@iowa.gov)

cc: File

LOVE CLUB LLC  
RELIABLE STREET INC  
LOCKWOOD CAFE

Plaintiff's Right-to-Sue Letter from the ICRC (A-9) — page 1 of 1.

Unable to secure legal representation without access to evidence between fall 2022 and 2023, Plaintiff submitted a formal request for the ICRC case file on September 8, 2023 — two days after receiving the Right-to-Sue Letter. On or around October 23, Plaintiff received the file and, for the first time, reviewed the statements and documents submitted by Defendants Nissen, Stewart, and Esker. Upon review, Plaintiff identified numerous statements and instruments she contends are materially false or misleading and that were relied upon by the agency in reaching its determination.

This date marks the **first point at which Plaintiff had access to the underlying evidence** relied upon by the agency. This delay underscores **the significant procedural disadvantage** Plaintiff faced throughout the administrative process — including her inability to obtain legal representation or meaningfully rebut the allegations prior to initiating this action.