



Handbook for DHS Systems Improvement Through Youth (SITY)



Welcome to SITY!

The Department of Human Services is thankful that you have agreed to invest in the futures of children and youth in Allegheny County and beyond. Your participation with SITY, as a youth advisor, will give voice to experiences that would otherwise be silent. With your help, DHS will improve choices for families and youth by better reflecting the needs of children and youth. It will be an adventure that will benefit us all.

Let's begin...

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Dear SITY Member, Parent or Guardian,

This handbook was created to encourage the ongoing success of Systems Improvement Through Youth (SITY). It is a resource for all current and future SITY members, and their parents/guardians.

The handbook is divided into four sections:

Section One contains an overview of both the history of SITY and the important role its members have in the conversations concerning services for children and youth in Allegheny County.

Section Two contains important rules and procedures established by the Department of Human Services to ensure a safe and positive environment for each youth participating on SITY. First is the set of rules that will be followed by DHS staff who work with SITY. Next are the sets of rules we expect youth to follow at meetings and while taking part in SITY-sponsored activities.

Section Three contains helpful information for youth travelers and event chaperones.

Section Four is the current SITY meeting schedule.

Each SITY member (and his/her parent(s)/guardian(s), if the member is younger than 18 years of age) is required to read this handbook and sign and date the Letter of Agreement found on page 11 to show understanding and intent to follow the rules and procedures put forth.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns please feel free to contact me at 412-350-3351.

Sincerely,
Maya Lyles
DHS Youth Engagement Specialist

Systems Improvement Through Youth (SITY) Overview

Allegheny County Department of Human Services Youth Development Project

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Youth Development Project is a strategic and important component of the DHS *Improving Outcomes for Children and Families Initiative*. The Improving Outcomes Initiative is broad-based, and will require community support to reach its stated goal by developing a truly integrated and comprehensive human services system. The change will include building capacity in technology, research and evaluation, and major growth of knowledge and skills of staff and provider organizations. It also includes extensive community input and support from wide-ranging community partners and recipients of services. DHS is committed to including the voice and experience of youth who have been recipients of DHS services in this transformation because of their personal knowledge of the child- and family-serving systems.

To do so, the Youth Development Project established the Allegheny County DHS Youth Advisory Council in 2009. In 2010, Council members chose Systems Improvement Through Youth or SITY as the name of the council. The council is comprised of 14 individuals, ages 16 through 25 years, who are active in or alumni of DHS and related child-serving systems including: child welfare, drug and alcohol, education, juvenile justice, mental health and mental retardation. Building on the value of their personal experiences in the system, they will be assisted to develop leadership skills as advocates and system advisors, be provided with positive experiences of social service careers and policymaking, and be encouraged in their professional development. Select representatives from different DHS service areas will be the channels through which information and ideas flow between DHS senior management, direct-service staff and council members. The relationship between these staff and council members will be enhanced as needed to insure the honest, culturally knowledgeable and efficient exchange of ideas. The goal of this communication is to spotlight the value of youth/professional teamwork in decision-making and long-range planning as regards to child- and family-serving systems.

In addition to being tapped as a resource within DHS, members of the council will connect in mutually respectful, give-and-take relationships with other stakeholders. Interaction with service providers, policy-makers and other youth advocacy groups,

active at the county, state and national levels, will allow an increase of the conversation, with the goal of strengthening the overall system of supports and services for youth in the wider community. SITY will have a *direct* impact on the lives of youth in the community as well. Through a peer mentoring program, council members will establish a peer support system, promote personal development, and educate youth about the value of having their voices heard. In this way, not only will the balance of the SITY be assured, but youth connections and commitment to their communities will be increased.

The initial council coordinator, also an alumnus of DHS child-serving systems, provided overall leadership and organizational development to SITY. With DHS support and guidance, the coordinator established selection protocol, length-of-term of SITY members and participation guidelines. The coordinator researched established methods of enhancing youth skills in team-building, communication, advocacy, conflict resolution, self-efficacy, and leadership, and selecting appropriate models to implement. Local and national consultants with specialized expertise were utilized to build on the particular curriculum components chosen to meet the needs of SITY. In addition, the coordinator facilitated the SITY's interaction with peer advocacy groups and participation in youth conferences. Through both, council members have an opportunity to share what they have learned and learn from other youth about the best ways to advocate for youth-sensitive services on behalf of their peers.

In late 2010, the role of the SITY coordinator was passed to the DHS Youth Engagement Specialist.

Rules and Procedures - DHS re: SITY

The Department of Human Services is committed to creating a safe and supportive environment for all members of SITY. We want this to be an enjoyable experience for all participants. The purpose of this list is to provide general guidance to the members of SITY about council responsibilities and expectations. It is not necessarily a complete list. All participants in meetings, conferences, outreach, trips or any other activity related to SITY need to know the following:

The Department of Human Services will:

- Provide monitoring, support and supervision to make sure compliance with rules and regulations set forth by those parties with which SITY will work
- Make sure that all people working with youth are properly trained and informed about their responsibilities
- Take all responsible steps to protect youth from harm or other dangers
- Make sure confidentiality is maintained
- Be respectful not only to the members of the council but to others involved in SITY efforts
- Promote well-being and safety for all council members, and therefore will
 - report those who bring drugs, alcohol or weapons, or make threats against themselves or others, to the proper authorities
 - not permit smoking in the building and will follow all city/county ordinances related to this matter
- NOT assume responsibility for lost or stolen personal items or property of council members - please do not bring valuables to meetings
- Hold financially responsible those individual members/guardians of the SITY involved in any property damage or destruction that occurs in a willful, hateful or destructive nature

Rules and Procedures - SITY Meetings

1. One person speaks at a time.
2. No Profanity.
3. Remember late comers must enter quietly and not disrupt the program once it has started.
4. No side conversations or disruptions.
5. Respect others and their opinions.
6. Check personal "baggage" at the door.
7. Meetings are confidential; don't talk about anything which was talked about in the meeting.
8. No questions or ideas are stupid.
9. You always have the right to pass if you don't want to speak.
10. Have fun but be serious.
11. You are a representative of DHS and all youth while you are here.
12. No cell phone use in the meeting room.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Rules and Procedures - SITY-sponsored Activities

To guarantee a safe and educational experience for all youth attending a council event, anyone attending a council activity must follow the procedures set forth.

DHS staff expectations

1. Staff/chaperones will arrive one hour prior to, and stay one hour after, each meeting.
2. Staff will ensure that youth are following rules and guidelines of conduct.
3. Staff will ensure that the security guard has a list of the members.
4. Staff will respond to safety and health situations in accordance with Department of Human Services standardized practices.
5. For each Allegheny County Department of Human Services field event, a DHS staff member will be placed in charge as the lead staff. The lead staff will recruit additional DHS staff to provide the required one-staff-person-per-five-youth ratio. All staff will have responsibility for enforcing compliance with agency procedures by all persons participating in the event.
6. No one under the age of 18 years will be permitted to participate in a field trip unless a permission slip is properly completed AND signed by a parent or guardian. Permission slips will be in the possession of the lead staff member who is supervising the group.
7. Prior to each event, DHS staff will verify that each youth in attendance has a completed permission slip with emergency contact information. These forms will remain in the possession of the lead staff throughout the event.
8. Prior to each event, DHS staff will verify that pickup arrangements have been determined for each participant and that any diversion from procedure is provided in writing by a parent or guardian.
9. Company/personal vehicles will not be used in any event without the written permission of the parent/guardian and DHS.
10. It is the responsibility of all DHS employees to monitor the behavior of participants at all times.
11. A briefing will be conducted with staff and participants prior to an event to share information and to ensure participants know what to expect of the event and to answer questions.
12. Lead staff must have cell phones for emergency use at all times.

SITY member arrival and attendance

When attending a meeting the following steps should be followed:

1. An RSVP should be made to lead staff to allow for coordinating adequate space and food - Please let them know if you have any specific needs or require special accommodations.
2. Please arrive 10 minutes ahead of meeting start time to allow for proper entry procedures to the meeting site.

Access to the building

Members are **ABSOLUTELY** prohibited from entering facilities without supervision.

If youth are coming early to the meeting, the following steps should be followed:

1. Get permission from staff/chaperones. If staff chaperones are not available, the security guard will provide you with the proper assistance and you must wait in the lobby area where the guard is posted.
2. Wait for staff in designated area, do not wander halls.
3. Members are prohibited from exploring the building or visiting without proper staff supervision.
4. Upon arrival, sign in with the security guard and he/she will direct you to the meeting location. Proceed directly to the meeting location. The building we meet in is secure for your safety and the safety of our staff.

Meetings/activities

1. Members are expected to participate in each session.
2. Restroom procedures - participants are encouraged to use the restrooms prior to the beginning of discussion. There will be no more than two persons using the facilities at any given time. Anyone wandering the halls will be asked to leave the premises.
3. To guarantee your safety anyone needing to leave the building prior to the end of the meeting must inform lead staff **prior to the meeting** so adequate supervision is available. Youth under the age of 18 years must have this request confirmed by their parent/guardian.

Field meeting/activities

The same steps should be observed as above including the following:

1. All appropriate permission slips and releases must be signed.
2. On outings, members of the council will stay within talking distance of the chaperones.

3. Members will act respectfully towards themselves, other members of the council, chaperones, staff and the general public.
4. Members will respect personal belongings and any property belonging to any organization with which the SITY interacts
5. Members who do not act in a respectful manner will be asked to leave if they are over 18 years of age or have a guardian pick them up if they are under 18 years of age, at their own or their guardian's expense.
6. If an emergent situation arises members are to inform the chaperones so appropriate actions can be taken.
7. Obey all rules and laws.

Departures

Once the meeting/activity has ended the following steps will be taken:

1. Members will sign for bus passes.
2. RSVPs will be made for the next meeting.
3. Members over 18 years of age, not under the supervision of a guardian will dismiss themselves. Members under 18 years of age must wait for their guardian or have a permission slip stating the way that they are permitted to leave.
4. Members should use or exit the building through the rear parking lot exit/waiting area.

Injuries

All injuries whether major or minor will be reported IMMEDIATELY to staff/chaperones so appropriate action is taken.

Property destruction

All property damage to facilities, furniture, or equipment must be reported to staff/chaperones. Members or caregivers will be held financially responsible for all intentional property destruction or damages.

Guests

Members are not permitted to bring guests and guests will not be permitted past security unless staff/chaperones have given permission prior to the meeting.

SITY Letter of Agreement

I, _____ have read and understand the SITY procedures set forth by the Department of Human Services in the Handbook for DHS Systems Improvement Through Youth (SITY).
I accept and commit to following all rules in regards to the council.

By signing this letter of understanding I am hereby responsible for all of my actions during SITY activities, which include but are not limited to outreach, field trips, conferences, meetings and special events.

Member Signature

Date

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

Date

Event Chaperone Guidelines

The role of a chaperone is an important one, and while enjoyable, requires that you accept certain responsibilities. The purpose of the Event Chaperone Guidelines is to provide you with an overview of responsibilities, and to make recommendations for appropriate responses to various situations that may arise during the course of a field trip.

Arrive 30 minutes prior to the event and bring a watch.

- It is important that event staff be early since trips are planned to depart from and return to One Smithfield Street, at specified times.

Performances or activities during the trip are scheduled and delays may disrupt the field trip for everyone including our hosts.

Dress appropriately.

- Casual, comfortable dress is recommended unless the event requires more formal attire. Remember that you are a role model for the group.

Know the youth in your group.

- It is important that you know the names of the participants in your group, up to a maximum of five per staff person. Event staff will be assigned participants prior to the event. The lead staff will retain the permission slips with the emergency contact information for youth attending the event. If someone refuses to follow your instructions inform the lead staff immediately.

Talk to the lead staff.

- Don't hesitate to ask questions if you have doubts as to what should be done in a given situation. The lead staff is in charge, and her/his directions must be followed at all times.

Watch carefully.

- Always think of the youths' safety first. Be alert and do not take any chances. Your responsibility is primarily to the youth in your group.
- Do not leave participants alone or unescorted.
- It is your responsibility to keep the group together. Youth must be escorted to the bathroom. There will be periodic bathroom and snack breaks.
- Participants are not allowed to leave for breaks alone. Everything must be done as a group.

IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY

Support staff will notify lead staff who will contact 911 and/or parents/guardians.

Youth Preparing to Travel

A Tip Sheet for SITY Members

Details about how you are going to travel

Not knowing the travel process and details can create anxiety, so get all of your information in advance.

When should you leave? When will you return home?

How early do you need to arrive at the airport, train station, or bus terminal?

Going:

I need to leave my house by _____.

Departure time is _____.

Arrival time is _____.

Return Home:

I need to leave my hotel by _____.

Departure time is _____.

Arrival time is _____.

I will return home by _____.

How will you travel? If by air, train, or bus, how do you get your ticket?

I am traveling by _____ (for example, airplane, United Airlines).

My flight number is _____ (for example, flight 611).

My ticket is _____ (for example, with my leader, an e-ticket).

How will you get to the airport, train station, or bus terminal? Finding someone to ride with will make the trip easier.

I am riding with _____.

His/her phone number is _____.

What is the contact information (name, telephone number, etc.) for the person who is responsible for your safety during the trip?

My contact/chaperone during the trip is _____.
His/her room # _____
His/her cell # _____.

If you have never traveled before, what will the experience be like on a plane, train, or bus? (Know the step-by-step procedure, so there are minimal surprises.)

What can you carry on with you and what should you be ready to have the carrier handle?

Make sure you have a clear understanding of the process of going through security.

What will airport security look for in your carry-on luggage?

There is always a list posted in the airport of what you cannot bring through security in carry-on luggage. Items may include: scissors, nail clippers, nail files, tweezers, razors, knives, any sharp object, mace, pepper spray, lighters, and strike-anywhere matches are not allowed in carry-on luggage. Bottled drinks or liquid food may not be brought through security but they can be purchased in the airport and brought on a plane.

What is the name, address, and phone number of the hotel where you will be staying?

Name of hotel is _____.

Address of hotel is _____.

Phone # and room # of hotel are _____.

What is the confirmation number for your reservation?

My confirmation # is _____.

How will you get from the airport or train station to the hotel?

I will get there by _____.

Most hotels require a credit card on arrival for what they call incidentals (any extra expenses charged to your room, such as movies or phone calls).

What should you do if you don't have a credit card?

_____.

How will you be able to contact a family member or caregiver when you arrive or if an emergency should arise?

Your program should provide you with long-distance access for at least one call home per day. Be sure to understand the process for paying for these calls before you leave home. You may get a prepaid calling card. Instructions for using the card are on the back of the card; ask for help if you need it.

Important NOTES

- Leave a copy of all your travel information at home in case someone needs to get in touch with you.
- When you arrive at the hotel, ask the front desk to be sure your name is listed for your room so your family can be connected to the right room if they call you.

Checklist of what to pack

This list needs to be individualized, but everyone needs some of these items.

- Don't forget a picture ID!
- Appropriate clothing for the weather where you are going. To see what the temperatures will be, check the Internet at weather.com or a newspaper (for example, USA Today).
- Bathing suits (check if the hotel has a pool).
- Appropriate shoes (for walking if there are activities outside of the hotel).
- Medications. (They must be in the original containers.)
- Activities for down time (for example, books, magazines, writing or drawing materials, card games, hand-held video games, Walkman/Discman). Be careful! You

are responsible for your own property.

- Toiletries (for example, toothpaste and brush, hair supplies, cologne, perfume, deodorant, shaving supplies, makeup, shampoo, and conditioner—if you don't like what the hotel provides).
- Contacts, glasses, or other eye-care-related items.

Expenses covered by SITY

You may receive a cash advance prior to your travel to pay for both ground transportation (to and from the hotel and airport) and meals during travel and on site.

- Ask if you need to save receipts or otherwise track the money you spend.

Make sure you talk with your responsible adult so that you have a clear understanding of what expenses will be covered and what expenses will not be covered during your travel.

What to expect in participating in a conference

- You have been selected to participate in the conference because *you are a leader* who will learn from others and teach others.
- Talk to your lead staff or the adult who asked you to participate about what you hope to get out of the conference. Ask what their expectations are for you during the conference.
- Try to get the agenda of workshops and activities for youth at the conference, so you can plan which activities you are interested in attending.
- Make sure that you have all permission slips signed before leaving, so you can participate in any off-site activities.

The conference is a time for learning and sharing your experiences and expertise to help others, but there will be time for fun, relaxation, talking, and getting to know other youth.

Allegheny County Department of Human Services
SITY Meeting Dates
First Quarter 2011



Business Meetings

Team-building Meetings

January 11, 2011

January 22, 2011

February 8, 2011

March 8, 2011

February 22, 2011

March 22, 2011

It is necessary to RSVP for the next meeting at the end of the current meeting to allow for an accurate number for planning food, transportation, seating, etc.

If you are unable to attend a meeting, **please inform** council lead staff.