



Over the last decade, Allegheny County has received a number of plaudits in the national media and some prestigious awards for its achievements in redesigning human services. While the emphasis has been chiefly on programmatic outcomes (reduced foster placements and greater permanency for children; innovative, effective alternatives and follow-up to incarceration; expanding opportunities for aging in place; community-based services in less restrictive settings for treating behavioral and developmental health issues), the root of all these changes lies in the restructuring of the administration and operation of the Department of Human Services (DHS).

In 1995, the Allegheny County Commissioners recognized that major changes were in order for county government. Not the least of the challenges was to streamline 30 separate departments, each reporting to the commissioners. To guide in the overall restructuring of county government, the commissioners appointed a blue ribbon Committee to Prepare Allegheny County for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Among the committee's recommended changes was to reorganize and streamline county government into fewer departments, including one encompassing human services. DHS would consolidate multiple functions previously housed in four separate departments with little interaction among them: child protective services; aging; employment and other safety net services; mental health, mental retardation, drug and alcohol; and homelessness services.

### Designing DHS and Redesigning the Human Services System

Envisioning a new "mega" department that would ensure consumers receive the most effective services possible, in the most efficient manner, did

not occur overnight. Creating the new overarching Department of Human Services was a major challenge and one that could not have been achieved without a community that was engaged. Collaboration and involvement were key ingredients. A community-based visioning process sought input and assistance from a broad range of stakeholders: representatives from the general public, foundations, universities, corporations, government, faith-based organizations, and nonprofit organizations. An Oversight Committee and advisory bodies in each discipline provided guidance and staff was involved at all levels. Philosophical, functional, and structural foundations for DHS were laid in

## Building the Framework for Human Service Integration: Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

the process. As a result, the blueprint vision for an integrated human services system in Allegheny County and the department's defined guiding principles for service delivery, as well as its basic organization, reflect input from virtually all strata of the community.

### Funding the Changes

The commitment of local foundations was crucial to the success of the newly designed DHS. Created in 1997, the Human Services Integration Fund (HSIF), an expeditious partnering of local, socially focused foundations, was a particularly welcome means of advancing the goals of the restructuring plans.

An original group of eight local foundations came together to form HSIF; eventually growing to a total of 17. The HSIF served as a flexible funding pool to support projects and activities that foster departmental integration/restructuring and are difficult or impossible to accomplish

with public-sector dollars. State monies are categorical and cannot be used creatively or without restriction. The HSIF-supported projects and activities help DHS to:

- ♦ establish consistent service priorities
- ♦ consolidate administration and services
- ♦ maximize use of state and federal funds

DHS (and thereby the residents of Allegheny County) has received nearly \$8 million in HSIF and other foundation support since 1997.

### Making Progress

The four former county departments were reorganized into five DHS program offices, which better reflect pro-

grammatic requirements. Functions that were previously nonexistent or handled separately by each department, including any support staff providing fiscal, human resources, planning, information systems, research, evaluation, and community and media relations assistance to the program staff, were consolidated into support offices. Such support consolidation produced economies of scale and necessary specialization required for tasks such as public relations. Moreover, fiscally, it permitted the maximization of state and federal funding required by program integration.

With input from subject matter experts in the community and with an eye toward improving outcomes and cost savings, basic administrative functions were consolidated, restructured and refined. These cross-cutting functions included human resources, financial management, budget and

*By enabling data-driven decision-making among DHS staff, it also makes possible better outcomes for the individuals the department serves, and by making the data readily available to providers throughout the region, it has become a significant community asset.*

contract compliance, and facilities management.

DHS also recognized that integration would pose very significant challenges for the new department's information technology systems, since the formerly independent departments stored information on clients, providers, and services in more than 80 disparate databases and systems. A Chamber of Commerce Information Systems Task Force recommended creating a Data Warehouse application to allow shared client information throughout the department.

DHS followed the Chamber of Commerce's recommendations to develop a computing architecture to support the business process of an integrated DHS that would include a common client-identifier operating application and the Data Warehouse to integrate information from the separate program offices. Today, the warehouse contains more than 25 million client records, receives data from 29 human service program areas, works in conjunction with the U.S. Census Bureau, and is capable of reporting data in real time—meaning, if required, the system can be refreshed at short intervals. The Data Warehouse has evolved into a central repository of social service data, which allows DHS to track and report client demographic and service data across its program offices and beyond. By enabling data-driven decision-making among DHS

staff, it also makes possible better outcomes for the individuals the department serves, and by making the data readily available to providers throughout the region, it has become a significant community asset.

## Results

As a result of this progress, Allegheny County residents are benefiting from an investment of funds that has nearly tripled over the last decade—but county taxpayers' share of those costs has declined nearly three-fold: from 9.4 percent in 1997 to 3.6 percent today.

More important, as fiscal resources have expanded, DHS also increased the number of people it is serving, in settings that are more accessible, and in ways that foster independence and permanency and address the totality of individual or family needs. Through technology the department has established greater fiscal and qualitative accountability. And these efficiencies have been accomplished by consolidating administrative functions and data management as well as by the physical relocation of staff and services. In short, Allegheny County has been able to:

- ◆ Simplify the structure of county government by combining four disparate areas of human services into a single “mega” department with shared support functions and a com-

mon database of client services and community needs;

- ◆ Integrate fiscal and budgetary functions to maximize and leverage resources in 194 funding streams in order to facilitate the use of unrestricted funds where they are most needed;
- ◆ Connect 350 service providers through automated two-way communication with one another, with DHS and with the central database;
- ◆ Consolidate programs and staff in four locations, reducing office space by 17,000 square feet and streamlining administrative procedures and processes to achieve a stronger, more centralized management system, thereby improving communication and collaboration among the various service areas;
- ◆ Cut the transaction time, through automation, for personnel paperwork from six weeks to five days and payment time for vendors from 20 days to five to seven days. Time to execute a contracting agreement is down to 55 days from 112 days prior to automation;
- ◆ Effect cost reductions of 10 to 30 percent by reducing processing time for hiring, payments, contracts, and audits. This transaction time-savings enabled DHS to focus on data analysis, performance evaluation, and business process improvements;
- ◆ Reduce administrative staff from 101 filled positions to 80; and
- ◆ Improve the ability to complete and file timely expense reimbursement claims. Claims that were more than 12 months late are now accurately submitted within the required reporting timeline.

## Lessons Learned

When DHS began the redesign work more than a decade ago, it examined other institutional restructurings

*See Locally Speaking on page 38*

grams. APHSA and its affiliate, the National Association of State Child Care Administrators (NASCCA) have been heavily involved in these activities.

On September 26, APHSA and NASCCA submitted a letter to the Office of Child Care (OCC) providing comments on their draft revisions to the Child Care Quarterly Case Record Report, also known as the ACF 801 Form. The proposed changes to the ACF 801 Form would expand its data elements to fully capture providers' participation on quality activities. APHSA and NASCCA are working closely with the OCC to offer feedback. It is our hope that these recommendations will be reflected in the final version of this form. States have been involved in receiving technical assistance and completing applications for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT ELC) grant program. States can use these funds to help improve the quality of their early care and education programs. While states have been steadfast at moving forward with their RTT ELC grant applications, APHSA and NASCCA have been intimately engaged during this process and are providing states with information and announcements from the federal government on RTT ELC.

On the congressional side of this activity, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee held a hearing on improving quality and safety in child care programs. APHSA and NASCCA submitted written testimony providing recommendations on reauthorizing the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and offering Congress ways to use CCDBG funds to improve quality. The testimony can be found on APHSA's web site at [www.aphsa.org](http://www.aphsa.org).

## Locally Speaking from page 32

across the county and, as already noted, were assisted by universities and other stakeholders that provided a wealth of comparative information in such areas as service integration, management information systems, and human resources. From this research and assistance shared, key learning points were incorporated into and reinforced by the county's change efforts:

- ◆ A clear leadership vision and champions of this vision are essential.
- ◆ Change does not occur overnight but rather through repeated messages and incremental changes in structure, practice, and incentives.
- ◆ Training can overcome resistance to change by helping employees develop the knowledge and skills to perform new tasks.
- ◆ Incentives must be aligned with new performance goals and expected behaviors.
- ◆ Communication with various audiences is a tool for overcoming resistance to change.
- ◆ Change involves merging disparate cultures; this can be managed by valuing flexibility and change and by celebrating both old and new organizational achievements.
- ◆ Institutional change is a never-ending journey.

Details of the transformational administrative and operational changes that have taken place within the Department of Human Services are available in a February 2011 report, which is available on the DHS web site at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/research-governance.aspx](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/research-governance.aspx).

Information about the department's initial redesign is available in the vision document, *Redesigning Human Services Delivery* in Allegheny County (1998), a subsequent *Progress Report* (1999), and the 2007 ten-year report, *Realizing a Community Vision*, which summarizes the first decade of progress and includes comments from a variety of leaders in the public and private sectors. (All three reports are available on the DHS web site at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/history.aspx](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/history.aspx).)

**Karen L. Blumen** is the deputy director of the Office of Community Relations at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

**Jon Rubin** is an Organizational Effectiveness consultant at the American Public Human Services Association.



[www.aphsa.org](http://www.aphsa.org)

Your *Online Guide* to the  
American Public Human Services Association

- Association News • Membership Information
- Member Help Desk • Conferences • Human Service Policy • Publications • News Releases • Job Bank
- Surveys and Reports

E-mail your story ideas, suggestions and comments to  
[amy.plotnick@aphsa.org](mailto:amy.plotnick@aphsa.org)