



2016

Allegheny County

Department of Human Services

Marc Cherna, Director

Office of Community Relations

Karen Blumen, DHS Deputy Director

One Smithfield Street, First Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15222-2221

Phone 412-350-6787 Fax 412-350-5891

Director's Action Line: 1-800-862-6783

Allegheny Link: 1-866-730-2368

Event and Donations Team: 412-350-3428

Background

Since being established in 1997, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Office of Community Relations (OCR) has been responsible for ensuring that DHS communicates in an optimum way about the department – its services and programs; mandates; policies and practices; initiatives and events – with all stakeholders – internal and external to DHS and through a variety of communications platforms. Those stakeholders include DHS staff, individuals who utilize one or more services through DHS (consumers/clients), DHS-contracted service providers, local and national media, elected officials, advocates, faith-based organizations, corporate and small business, other human and social service agencies and the general public. OCR also educates the public about human-service-related issues through its support of local and national awareness campaigns. The work of OCR reflects a commitment by Allegheny County and DHS to be as accessible, informative and transparent as possible and responsive to the needs of County residents.

Information is shared through a number of communications methods including: DHS publications, traditional media, videos, various forms of community interface and electronic media including email and social media messaging. Telephone and walk-in assistance is offered for residents who have questions and/or concerns. The community is also encouraged to donate to programs that benefit residents, particularly children, receiving services through the department. Such programs extend the reach of human services offerings by providing goods and services that government could not otherwise provide.

In addition to strategic communications personnel, OCR includes the Director's Action Line (DAL), the Allegheny Link, Specialized Homeless Services and Supports, and the Event and Donations Team.

OCR Contact Numbers

- General inquires pertaining to DHS: 412-350-6787
- Media contacts: 412-350-3439 or 412-350-6897
- Director's Action Line: 1-800-862-6783 – Concerns, questions and complaints about DHS services
- Allegheny Link: 1-866-730-2368 – Concerns for persons over 60 and persons with a disability or any individual experiencing a housing crisis. Also, coordinated referral for home visiting programs for parents/caregivers of children age 0 to 6

- OCR Event and Donations Line: 412-350-3428 – Questions about donations (giving and receiving) and upcoming events

Messages left after work hours (weekdays between 5:00 p.m. – 8:00 a.m. and weekends) are returned as soon as possible.

Communications Methods

Publications

Unless otherwise noted, all DHS publications are available in PDF format on the DHS website.

DHS News is the DHS monthly news articles published by OCR. *DHS News* includes articles about new and changing DHS programs and services, recognition of DHS staff or consumers, and DHS events. Current and archival issues are posted on the DHS website. E-mail announcements and Facebook and Twitter posts alert staff and contracted providers when new articles are published.

DHS Making an Impact is a series that spotlights how individuals and families benefitted through the DHS services they received. Issues are posted on the DHS website and made available in hard copy at various events and venues throughout the County.

DHS Brochures provide information about services offered through DHS program offices (Offices of Behavioral Health; Community Services; Children, Youth and Families; Intellectual Disability; and Area Agency on Aging), and some DHS bureaus and individual programs. Many brochures are available in Spanish. Brochures are made available in hard copy at community and DHS-sponsored events, the Human Services Building, the Allegheny County Information Center, local libraries, provider agencies and other appropriate locations.

A Parent's Handbook is given to parents at the outset of their involvement in the child welfare system. The handbook details the rights and responsibilities of the parent, the child(ren), the child welfare staff and the courts. The handbook is available in Spanish.

DHS Annual Reports, published between 2000 and 2006, highlighted the ways DHS remained true to its Vision and Guiding Principles as it provided services and supports to the County's most vulnerable populations. *DHS Realizing a Community Vision - A Decade of Progress 1997- 2007* provides a retrospective of the first ten years of DHS, courtesy of individuals who were involved in the shaping of the department.

Research Reports are evaluations and assessments of our programs and services produced by the Office of Data Analysis, Research, and Evaluation, and distributed by OCR.

Media Relations

Local print, radio and television media outlets are alerted through news releases and requests for coverage about current and upcoming DHS stories of interest. OCR staff also responds to media inquiries generated by local and national news stories that are tied to human services in general or DHS specifically.

Local and national publications rely on OCR staff to provide articles on specified topics related to human services.

Right to Know and Information Requests

OCR is responsible for responding to Right-to-Know requests for DHS.

Community Interface

Assistance

County residents are able to contact OCR staff via phone or in person.

The Director's Action Line (DAL) staff are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There is also a DAL e-mail address, DAL@AlleghenyCounty.US, and the DAL accepts walk-in visits, weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Professional, responsive staff answer questions, investigate concerns and inform consumers of the results. They assist directly when possible and explain procedures for getting additional help if necessary. The content and quantity of requests for assistance made to the Director's Action Line are also used to generate data for statistical analysis to help evaluate policies, procedures, practices and employee response.

The Director's Action Line 1-800-862-6783 was initially implemented in the fall of 1996 to empower families and children served by the child welfare system by providing a means to register concerns and complaints about services received. It was broadened to include services provided through the entire Department and contracted providers in 1998. Now consumers may address concerns and resolve issues that hinder effective service delivery and request information about any aspect of DHS services and programs.

The Allegheny Link 1-866-730-2368 was established in 2005 to simplify and streamline to long-term living services and supports. The Allegheny Link offers a one-stop resource that provides information referrals/assistance, person-centered counseling, eligibility screening for public and privately funded services and supports, assistance with completing applications for these services (when necessary) and general short-term service coordination in an effort to help individuals and families maintain their independence, dignity and quality of life. Building on this mission the Allegheny Link also assists individuals experiencing a housing crisis to access the Allegheny County Homeless System in a more coordinated manner. The Allegheny Link is also providing a coordinated referral service for home visiting programs for parents/caregivers of children age 0 to 6 in Allegheny County looking for support throughout their pregnancy and early stages of the child's development. The Allegheny Link can be accessed Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Homeless Services and Supports increases the service capacity of the homeless services system through both a macro and micro approach. The Homeless Services and Supports Coordinators work alongside the existing emergency shelter case managers to supplement their services and provide additional support where needed. They use a holistic approach to work with the families; focusing not only on the parents, but also the children. The Homeless Services and Supports Coordinators help the families maintain connections to existing services and make connections to new ones. Through the use of Conferencing and Teaming they engage all the familial, informal and formal supports as the family drives the process of goal-setting and action planning. Lastly, the Services and Supports Coordinators follow the family out of the shelter into their residence to provide some continuity of service and a consistent point of contact. To address the need for more systematic training and capacity building amongst the homeless providers, the Community Resource Specialist works with the providers to address capacity and system issues. The Community Resource Specialist assists housing programs with their ability to identify and participate in assets and needs assessments in order to increase consumer access to needed services.

Community Engagement and Donations Acquisition provide DHS the opportunity to engage and educate residents of Allegheny County about service offerings and the needs of those receiving services. OCR provides DHS representation at various information fairs throughout the County including senior fairs and community celebrations. In addition, OCR plans and executes several annual events that combine awareness-building with recognition, and/or donation acquisition.

The DHS Holiday Project (since 1980s) provides gifts for abused and neglected children and youth whose families are served by the DHS Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) through donations from local corporations, faith-based organizations, school groups and the general public.

Project Prom (since 2003) provides a selection of donated new and gently used formal attire and accessories to high school students whose families receive services through DHS.

Project Prom for Gentlemen (since 2012) allows guests to enjoy a catered meal, a lively discussion about the importance of treating themselves and others with dignity and respect, and tie tying demonstrations. Attendees also receive a free tuxedo rental

Project Prom Priming (since 2016) allows guests to enjoy a catered meal while learning about the etiquette of such occasions and engage with mentors and vendors about topics related to dignity and respect and beauty, inside and out.

The Project Prom 5K Run & Walk (since 2014) is an annual fundraiser at Hartwood Acres Park with proceeds benefitting Project Prom.

Allegheny County Music Festival (since 2000) is an annual benefit concert that takes place in late-summer. The Allegheny County Music Festival Fund supplements traditional funding streams to provide otherwise unattainable life-enriching items and opportunities for children receiving services through DHS.

Candidates Comedy Night (since 2008) is an additional fundraiser for the Allegheny County Music Festival Fund. CCN features local politicians and candidates for federal, state and local political offices taking the stage to perform comedy, music and other talents for the gathered contributors.

Summer Books provides donated new and gently used children's books to children who attend select summer food program sites.

School supplies and backpacks are collected during a summer drive and distributed to children in need.

Other drives for vulnerable populations are conducted and encouraged to support children, individuals who are homeless and older adults who are often in need of items that government funding cannot provide.

Awareness and Educational Campaigns

OCR staff raise awareness of human services and child safety issues of particular concern to the Department and community. The campaigns listed below are annual events. Other campaigns may be launched in response to unsettling trends in the community. Topics have

included ensuring safe sleep for infants, leaving children safely home alone, choosing a child's caregiver(s) with care, and the developmental importance of speaking directly to babies and infants.

Self Help Awareness Month is recognized in January. DHS produces and distributes materials listing confidential self-help resources in Allegheny County.

Child Abuse Prevention Month is commemorated in April. DHS works with other local organizations to improve the public's understanding of their role in preventing child abuse.

Children's Mental Health Month is recognized in May. DHS takes a lead role in raising awareness of the importance of identifying mental illness concerns in children and youth and reducing the stigma associated with seeking assistance related to improving mental health.

National Depression Screening Day in October and National Alcohol Screening Day in April are supported by posting the links to the NDS and NASD screening tools on the DHS web site and encouraging staff and the general public to participate.

Disability Awareness Month takes place in October. Awareness-building activities generally center on a particular concern in the disability community such as employment, accessibility or housing.

Electronic Media

OCR utilizes electronic communication as a quick, efficient and "green" method of reaching wide audiences.

The DHS website, <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/human-services/index.aspx>, is maintained by the DHS (OCR) webmaster. The site's main headings are programs and services; about; news and events; resources and careers. Within these categories is information for consumers, providers, the media, policy makers and the general public.

DHS Intranet is maintained as a resource for news and information of importance to DHS staff. The most current DHS staff directory, policies and forms are accessible here.

E-mails issued using DHS staff distribution lists and/or listserves to internal/external stakeholders convey important information of a timely nature.

DHS maintains Facebook (www.facebook.com/acdhs), Twitter (www.twitter.com/acdhs), and LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/allegheny-county-department-of-human-services>) pages to facilitate two-way communication with our stakeholders that use social media. Visit our pages for just-in DHS news, announcements of achievement, human services-related information, and more.

Video Production

OCR Video Production Team creates videos for the education and training of DHS consumers, staff and providers. Videos are also produced for recruitment, awareness campaigns across DHS program and support offices, and to supplement or promote research reports. To view DHS videos, visit: <https://vimeo.com/acdhs>.