

Allegheny County Department of Human Services Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) Current as of February 2014

[Terms in blue ink are defined in Glossary](#)

CYF 007 – Services for Client Families

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) refers and/or provides a wide range of in-home and out-of-home services to families to prevent child abuse and neglect, with the aim of keeping children at home with their families whenever possible.

DHS helps provide many families with "a place to go" even when they are not involved with CYF.

- Of 33 community-based Family Support Centers in Allegheny County, 27 are funded by DHS.
- First Steps--a voluntary program that mentors new mothers by providing a home visitor for mothers with children from birth through five years of age.
- Summer and Year-Round Funds for Children's Programs--provide positive and enriching summer (camp) and after-school programming for children with higher levels of need or risk.

CYF can provide concrete goods and services for families through other DHS program offices and a network of provider agencies. Services are carefully selected and individualized according to the needs of each family. In all, there are more than 280 DHS-sponsored programs for families involved with CYF.

In-Home Services

With the aim of preventing the need for foster care placement, many families receive *in-home* services to strengthen the home environment and family unit. In home services may include crisis intervention, parenting skills training, child abuse prevention training, family counseling, life skills training, and/or family reunification services. In-home services help families recognize and strengthen their natural supports, and identify community-based services that can be utilized when needed, rather than ongoing services provided by CYF.

Recognizing that substance misuse or abuse often contributes to the reasons why families become involved with child welfare, CYF works closely with the Pennsylvania Organization for Women in Early Recovery (P.O.W.E.R.) Connection. Located in CYF's regional offices, P.O.W.E.R.'s certified addictions counselors will assist caseworkers by evaluating the family member's substance use (at the family home) and make recommendations regarding appropriate treatment type, facilities, service coordination, mentoring, relapse prevention, consultation and follow-up care.

In-home services are often enough to keep the family intact, but sometimes to ensure the safety of a child (after a pre-placement staffing meeting has been held), CYF may ask a Judge to remove custody of the child(ren) from their parent/s, guardian/s, or custodian/s.

Foster Care Placement

Once out-of-home placement has been deemed necessary by a Juvenile Court Judge (or sometimes on a voluntary basis), the child/ren will be immediately placed with relatives or close family friends, commonly known as "kinship care." When a relative that can meet criteria as a licensed foster parent cannot be located immediately, CYF will place the child in the temporary care of a foster family or shelter care while the search continues for a relative foster home for the child and sibling/s. When a family setting is inappropriate or can not be found for a child, a child may go to a group home or residential treatment center.

CYF works together with families to support and encourage the reunification of children with their parents.

Families who are apart stay in touch through family visits. CYF makes many opportunities for family visits among parents and children and children and their siblings, providing transportation and supervision, when needed. When possible, CYF will schedule evening and weekend family visits at the family's home or at sites in the community, rather than in a CYF office.

Permanency Planning

When a child is in any kind of CYF placement, the family's progress toward the goals indicated in their Family (Service) Plan and Child Permanency Plan is monitored by CYF and the Court. CYF makes recommendations about permanency options to the Allegheny Court of Common Pleas Family Division, but Children's Court Judges make final decisions about placement and adoption.

Most of the time, reunification is the primary permanency goal, but Caseworkers are mandated to work concurrently on an alternative plan to find the child a legally permanent home. If it is determined that reunification is not possible, CYF may be ordered by the Court to locate an adoptive home for the child. Counseling services may be offered to both biological and adoptive parents and children to help families in this situation.

If adoption is not an option for a particular child, such as when relatives are committed to their kin, but do not want to adopt, permanent legal custodianship may be pursued. If none of these are options for a child, another permanent living arrangement must be made.

Independent living

Based on an assessment of need, children who stay in the custody of CYF past their 16th birthday may become eligible for Independent Living Skills Training to assist with the transition out of CYF's care and into independent adulthood.

DHS Integrated Service Plan Meetings

When a child or parents needs are especially challenging or complex, a DHS Integrated Service Plan meeting can be requested by the youth, parent, extended family member, natural support person, or a system representative. DHS Executive Office accepts the referral, and a meeting is convened with representation across DHS to help identify appropriate, enhanced supportive resources and services that exist across various program offices. When the human service needs cannot be met within DHS' current array of services, the matter is sent to the Multi-System Rapid Response Team for further action.

The Multi-System Rapid Response Team has the authority to pool resources in order to develop viable short- and long-term plans that address individual needs that may not fit neatly into the existing service array at DHS. Through this process, enhanced packages of services are created or arranged to secure appropriate care and treatment.

Other DHS Programs

The DHS Office of Community Relations Event and Donations Team coordinates donation-collection drives and disbursements to enhance the lives of the children served through DHS.

For example, the DHS Holiday Project has provided holiday gifts to children receiving services through CYF since the 1980's. And, since 2003, Project Prom helps high school students who are served by DHS attend their prom in style by collecting and making available new and gently used prom gowns and gift cards for tuxedo rentals.

OCR also administers the Allegheny County Music Festival Fund which was established in 2000. Under the direction of the ACMFF Committee, the fund turns proceeds from an annual County-sponsored concert along with local foundation grants into art, music, and sports lessons, museum memberships, and a wide array of opportunities for children that are not available through traditional governmental funding.