

Allegheny County Community Action Agency: Consumer Input and Involvement – DHS Self Sufficiency Program

Findings from 2018 DHS Self Sufficiency Participant Satisfaction Survey (Fall 2018)

Background

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds are distributed by the State and executed through a network of community action agencies aimed to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower low-income families and individuals in rural and urban areas to become fully self-sufficient. Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is the community action agency for Allegheny County (excluding City of Pittsburgh) and administers the DHS Self-Sufficiency Program (DHSSSP). The community action agency's (CAA) mission statement is "to empower individuals and families with limited resources to improve their quality of life through service coordination and positive community relationships."

DHS created and piloted a satisfaction survey in November 2016¹ as a response to the Federal Office of Community Services (FOCS) organizational standard for consumer input and involvement². In September 2018, DHS piloted the use of text message (SMS) to administer the DHSSSP customer satisfaction survey. One advantage of SMS technology for surveys is the ability to reach more clients at lower cost to both the client and staff. SMS may also reduce the effects of social desirability³, where people feel pressured to give positive or pleasing answers during social interactions. The distancing effect of SMS (vs. Phone) can reduce these effects. DHS staff then followed up via phone with program participants who did not or could not complete the SMS survey. Surveys across years changed slightly based on insights from previous years. Where relevant and possible data across years will be compared. Survey administration across years has also changed in an effort to increase efficiency and response rates.

¹ [DHS completes first CSBG consumer survey \(February 2017\)](#)

² According to the standard (1.3), "The department has a systematic approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting customer satisfaction data to the tripartite board/advisory body, which may be met through broader local government processes."

³ <https://www.n-r-c.com/social-desirability-bias-and-mode-effect/>

Methodology

Table 1. DHS Self-Sufficiency Program Survey Process

2016	2017	2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administered in November • Administered by agency program staff • Paper-based and web-based survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administered in September • Removed option to complete via web-based survey • Select sites with low response rate from 2016 DHSSSP survey had phone interviews (conducted by DHS staff) • Surveyed both active and closed participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administered in September and early October • Piloted SMS survey technology • DHS staff followed up with phone interviews • Surveyed both active and closed participants

Survey Respondents

The overall response rate was approximately 51% (n=40) for participants enrolled in DHS self-sufficiency programs (N=78)⁴. This is a decrease from last year's satisfaction survey response rate at 67% (50). Of those clients who participated in the survey in 2018, response rates by SMS were better compared to when DHS staff contacted participants by phone⁵. See Figures 1-2.

Figure 1. DHSSSP satisfaction survey response rate by year.

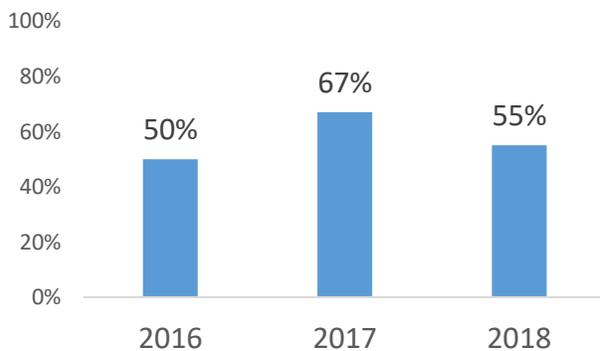
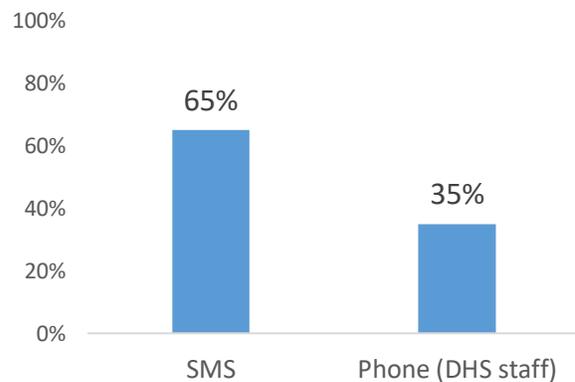


Figure 2. DHSSSP 2018 survey response rate by method



See response rates by agency in Table 2 below, which ranged from 25% to 100%.

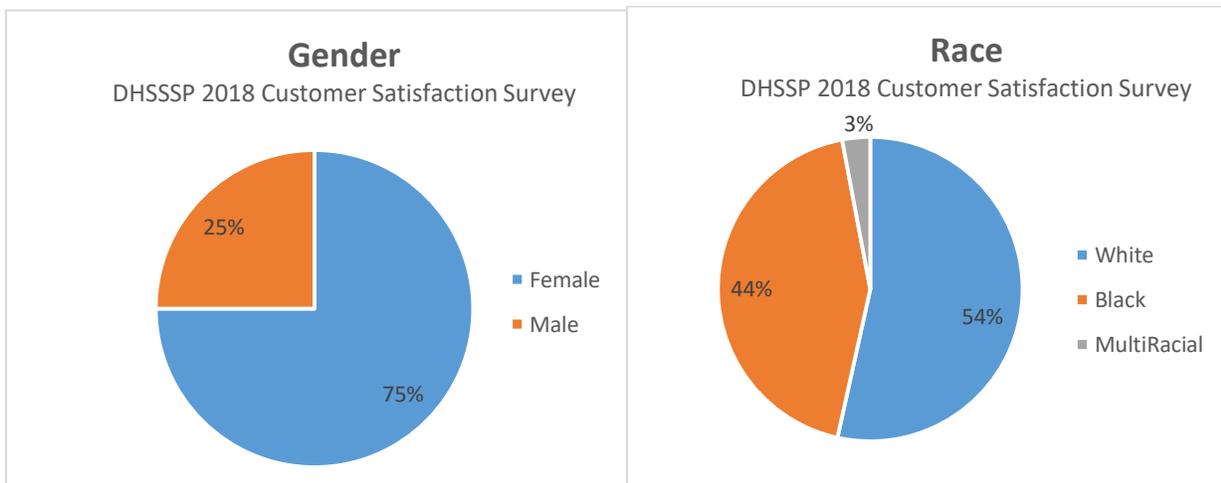
⁴ In completing the survey, participants had the option to leave any question blank. Any following question or visualization that has fewer than 40 responses will be specifically noted.

⁵ Clients were contacted by SMS before an attempt to complete the survey by phone was made. All clients who did not complete the survey by SMS were called. Of those that were sent an SMS (78) 38% completed the survey. Of those that were called to take the survey (49) 29% completed the survey.

Table 2. Overview survey respondents by CSBG Provider and by Survey Year

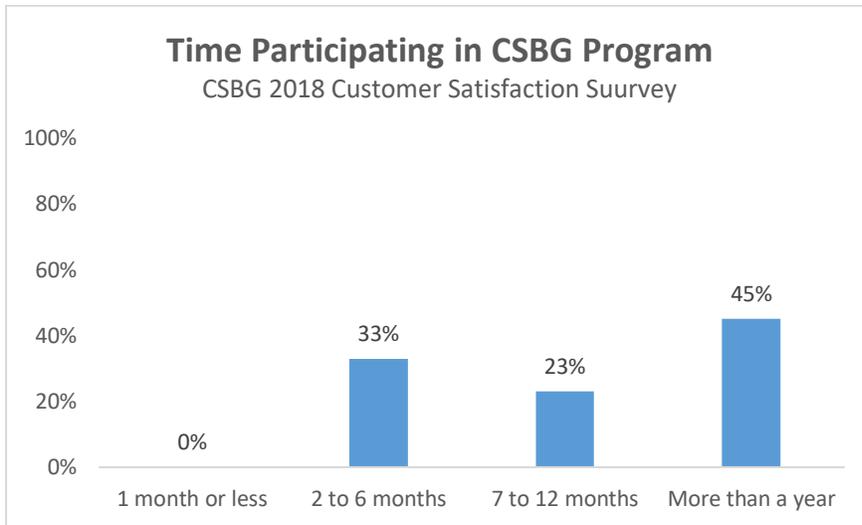
CSBG Provider	2017 Survey Admin	2017 % (n)	2018 Survey Admin	2018 %(n)	Change in Response Rate
AVAC	Phone	50% (3)	Total	57% (8)	↑
			SMS	5	
			Phone	3	
CCAC	Phone	55% (6)	Total	25% (2)	↓
			SMS	1	
			Phone	1	
Rainbow	Phone	50% (3)	Total	25% (2)	↓
			SMS	2	
			Phone	0	
Link	Phone	100% (5)	Total	100% (6)	=
			SMS	3	
			Phone	3	
HSSC	Self-report	100% (10)	Total	33% (5)	↓
			SMS	2	
			Phone	3	
NHCO	Self-report	53% (16)	Total	65% (15)	↑
			SMS	11	
			Phone	4	
MVI	Self-report	100% (7)	Total	50% (2)	↓
			SMS	2	
			Phone	0	

Figures 3-4. Survey Respondents by Demographics



Survey participants are representative of total number of DHSSSP participants across gender and race. At the time of the survey, 81% (61) of total active participants were female and 19% (14) were male. 55% (41) of total active participants identified as White, 39% (29) as Black or African American and 5% (4) as MultiRacial or Other.

Figure 5. Length of Service of Survey Participants



45%(18) of survey respondents have been active in their self-sufficiency program for more than 1 year, whereas 33% (13) have been active in their program for between two and six months. Length of service was calculated using administrative data on the date a client became active in service. The Length of service of survey respondents differed slightly (within 10%) from that of total active DHSSSP participants. 35% (26) of all active participants have been involved in their self-sufficiency program for more than a year, 37% between two and six months, 23% (17) between seven and twelve months.

Results

Agency Experience

88% (35) of survey respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with their service or program. This is slightly less than the 90% (45) overall satisfaction from 2017. In 2018, satisfaction differed across demographics like race (Black or African American n= 17, White n=21, Multiracial n<5) and gender (Female = 30, Men = 10).

Female participants report higher levels of being very satisfied compared to male clients. However, there is a broader distribution among female participants who do not report being very satisfied, indicating that while a higher rate of female clients are very satisfied, those who are not very satisfied are more likely to be less than satisfied.

Clients who identified as white reported higher levels of satisfaction (91% either satisfied or very satisfied) compared to clients who identified as Black or African American (81% either satisfied or very satisfied.) All of the clients who identified very unsatisfied experiences were Black or African American.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with DHSSSP

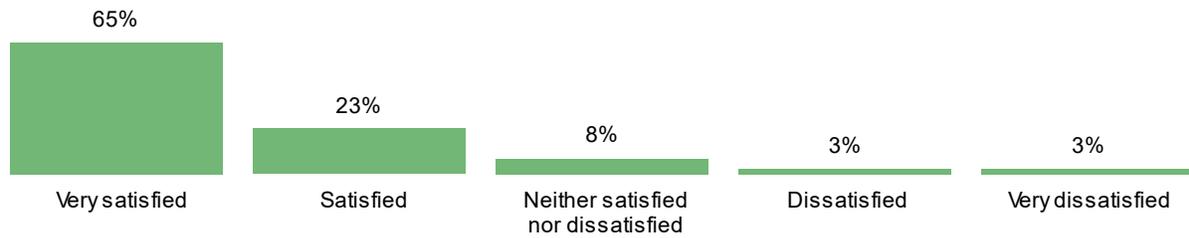


Figure 7. Satisfaction by gender

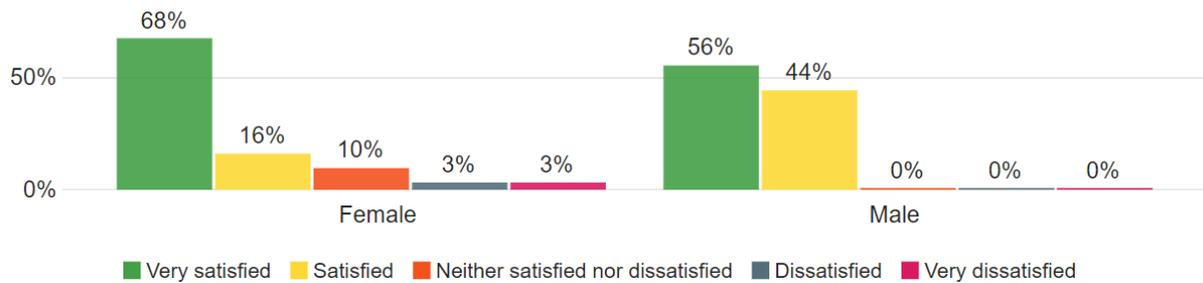
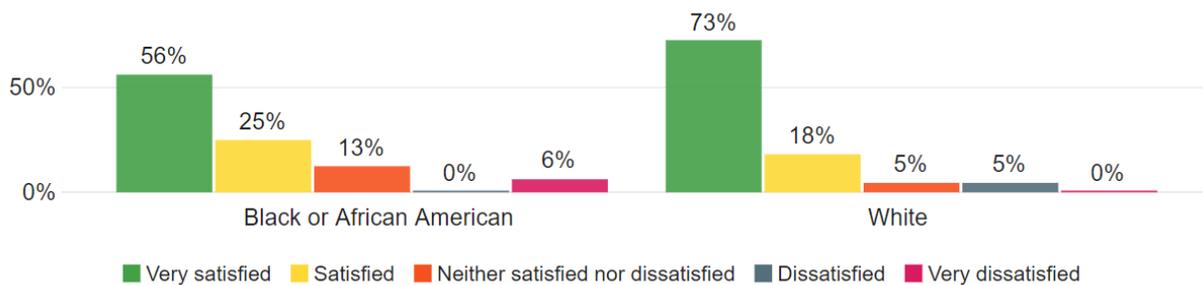


Figure 8. Satisfaction by race⁶



Staff Experience

Overall, DHSSSP participants reported positive experiences working with their staff member. 98% (39) of respondents said staff were very respectful or respectful of them. This is comparable to 2017 ratings (100%) of agreement with the statement “I am treated with dignity and respect.” These sentiments were also echoed in the open-ended comments, where participants expressed good relationships with

⁶ Multiracial was not included in this analysis to protect the clients’ anonymity because n<5.

staff as being a major strength of the programs. It was especially appreciated by participants when staff went beyond the scope of the specific program to help them work through barriers to participation. Feelings of respect differed slightly within demographics as 94% (16) of black/African Americans said staff were respectful/very respectful compared to 100% (21) of white participants.

Figure 9. Satisfaction with DHSSP Staff Member- respect

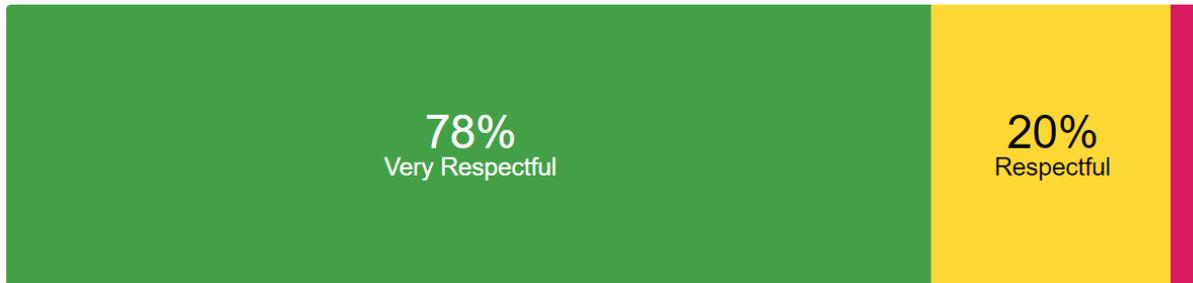
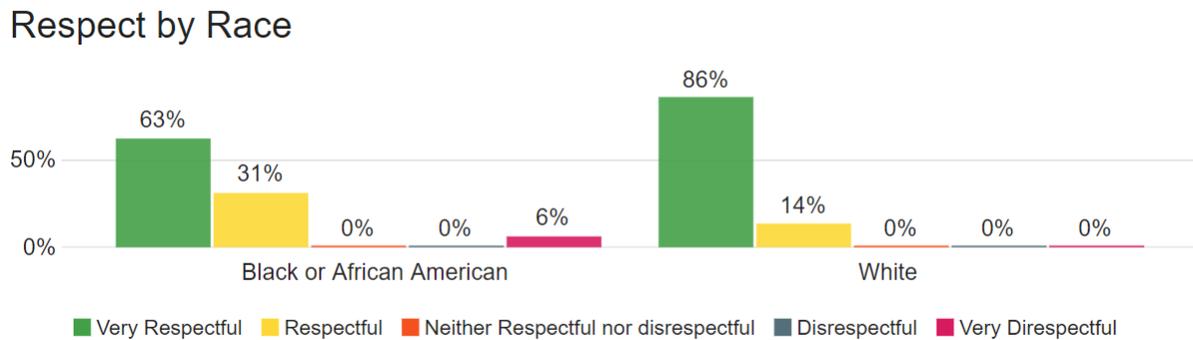


Figure 10. Staff respect by race⁷



Among the *experience with staff* questions, there was less satisfaction in participants’ ability to contact staff. Ease of getting in touch with staff had a negative change from previous years.

Table 3. Satisfaction with DHSSSP Staff Member: Comparing 2016, 2017 & 2018 Results

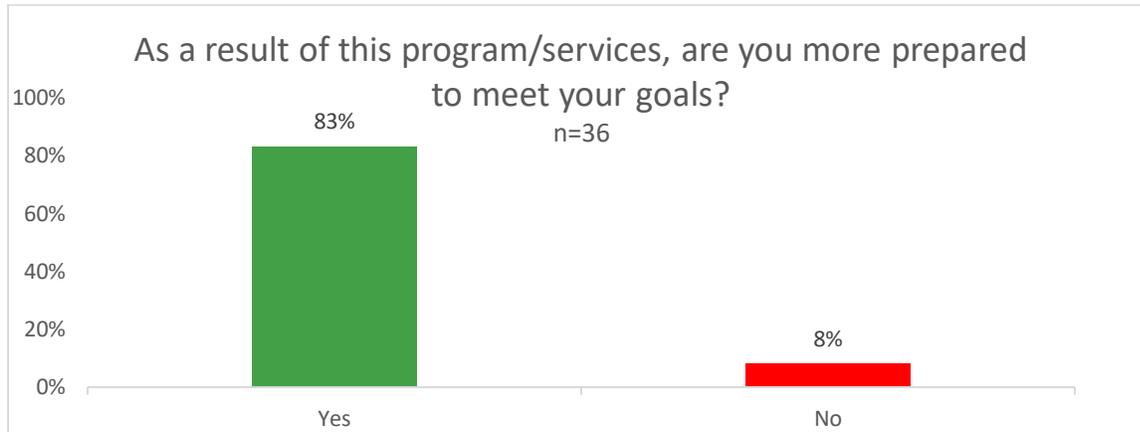
Measure	2016 (n=75)	2017 (n=50)	2018 (n=40)
Easy to get in touch with staff	98%	100%	88%

⁷ Multiracial was not included in this analysis to protect the clients’ anonymity because n<5.

Preparation to meet their goals after program participation

Participants were asked to reflect on how prepared they felt to meet their goals after participating in the program. 92% (33) of participants said they were prepared to meet their goals, 8% (3) participants responded “No” they were not prepared to meet their goals and 4 participants did not answer the question⁸.

Figure 11. Preparedness Meeting Goals

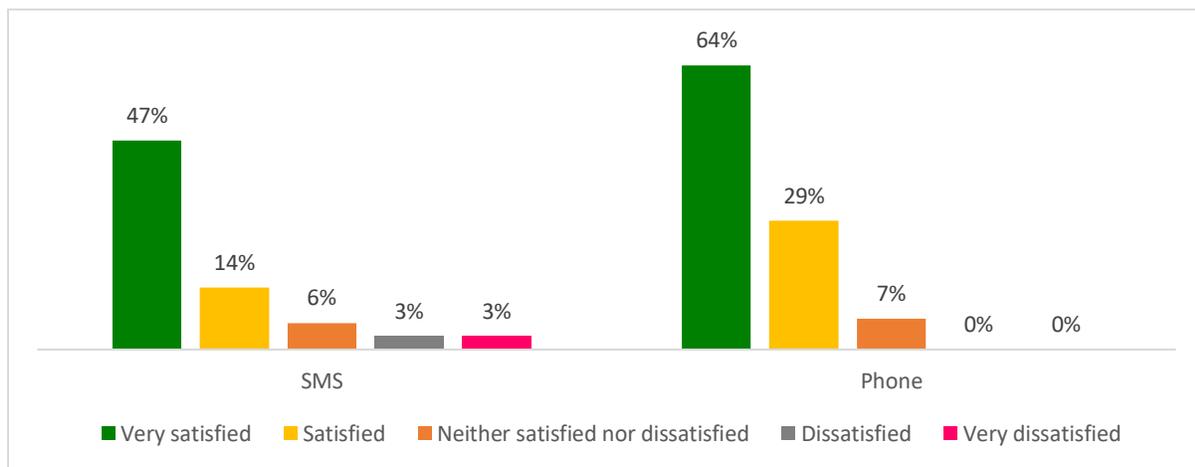


While we cannot prove causality, it is safe to say that majority of participants in program feel more confident to meet their stated goals.

Understanding Survey Method

Clients ratings of satisfaction varied by survey method (phone and SMS). Clients who took the survey by SMS were less satisfied, and had a wider range of answers, than those who took the survey by phone. This suggests that clients may be more willing to share less positive insights through the more impersonal, SMS survey method.

Figure 12. Satisfaction rate by survey method



⁸ In completing the survey, participants had the option to leave any question blank. Any following question or visualization that has fewer than 40 responses will be specifically noted.

Opened ended Questions

The survey asked two opened ended questions, synthesized in the tables below. Table 4 displays an analysis of comments made by participants in response to the question: “When you think about the services you receive what has been the most helpful in preparing you to meet your goals?” Clients mention many specific aspects about their staff relationships, as well as financial, training, and other community-based resources.

Table 4. Qualitative Synthesis Open-ended Comments: Most helpful in preparing to meet goals

Quality	Characteristics	Example Quotes
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability • listening • problem solving • kindness • understanding • flexibility • willingness to help • emotional support 	<p><i>“I have a support staff that allows me dignity as I push through recovery...”</i></p> <p><i>“They will help you when you’re going through hard times and they will listen”</i></p> <p><i>“[staff member] has been amazingly helpful, informative, always giving me resources, information and materials.”</i></p>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgets • Credit score 	<p><i>“The fact that I get help with budgeting”</i></p> <p><i>“Helping me to figure out a budget, guiding me to how to get my credit restored”</i></p> <p><i>“the financial aspect”</i></p>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer training • Job leads/job search 	<p><i>“Helping me with job applications.”</i></p> <p><i>“the classes are awesome!”</i></p> <p><i>“Schooling, they helped me get into school and helped with my major.”</i></p>
Community referrals and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • referrals to other agencies • increased awareness about other community resources 	<p><i>“Access to more resources I didn’t know were available.”</i></p>

Table 5, below, illustrates most common answers in response to the open-ended question: “What barriers or challenges did you face working on your goals?” Participants discuss challenges in their personal lives which made it difficult to take full advantage of the program, such as financial stress and internal struggles such as depression and anxiety. Other barriers mentioned include:

Table 5. Qualitative Synthesis Open-ended Comments: Challenges in meeting goals

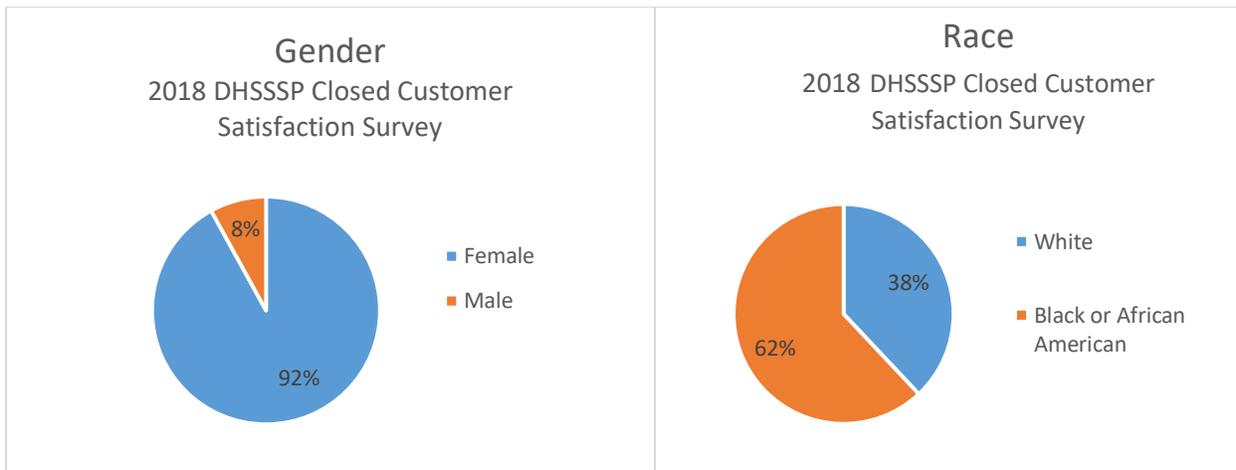
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • Having a disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare • Family health problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional challenges • Homelessness
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Closed Participant Survey Results⁹

The DHSSSP also surveyed inactive participants. The response rate was 28% (n=13) of those whose cases had been closed within 6 months of September 2018 (n=46). Similar to the active survey, participants were first contacted via SMS then a DHS staff member followed up with participants who did not complete the SMS via telephone.

Closed Survey Respondents by Demographics

Figures 13-14 Closed Survey participants, Gender and Race



Satisfaction with the program

Overall, 85% (11) of inactive participants said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their program. This satisfaction rate is comparable to that of active program participants and follows consistent demographic patterns.

Figure 15. Satisfaction with program, closed case participants

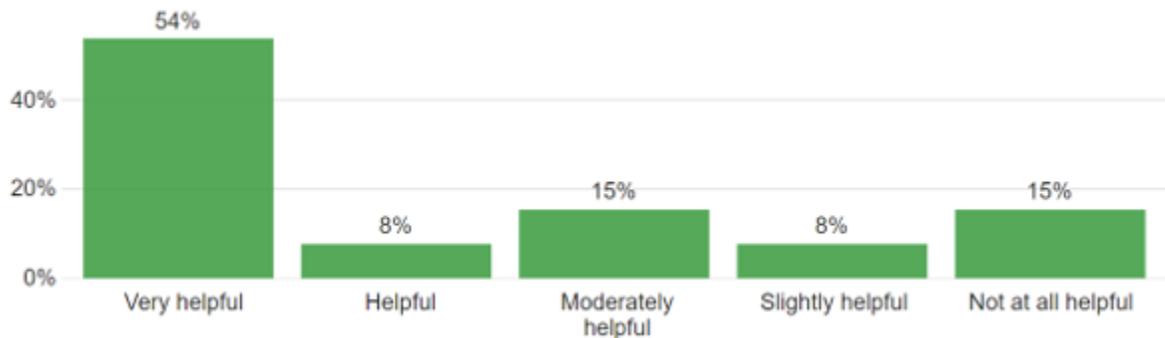


⁹ Due to a small sample size, demographic breakdowns are not provided for closed responses.

Community Supports

62% (8) of the closed survey respondents reported that the program was either very helpful or helpful in connecting them to community supports while 15% (2) reported the program was not at all helpful in connecting them to community supports.

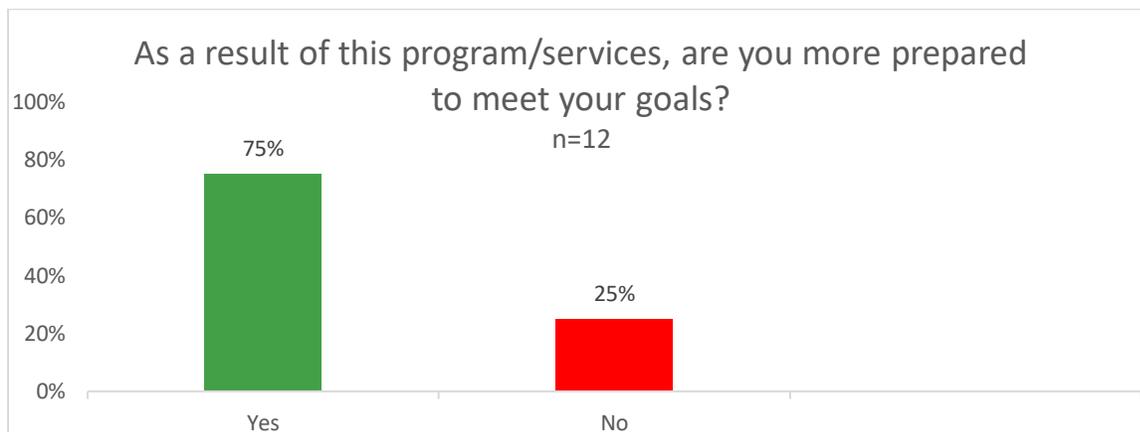
Figure 16. Helpfulness of connections to community supports, closed case participants



Preparation to meet goals

Similar to the active client survey, the majority of respondents to the question about preparedness to meet goals said they were more prepared to meet their goals as a result of the program (n=12)¹⁰.

Figure 17. Prepared to meet goals, closed case participants



Open-ended Question

Closed participants were asked what was most helpful in meeting their goals. Answers could be grouped under three main headings about program staff, emotional support, and program tools.

“Just knowing that the [provider] is there for the community

¹⁰ In completing the survey, participants had the option to leave any question blank. Any following question or visualization that has fewer than 40 responses will be specifically noted.

the bus pass program was very effective being I don't have a vehicle at the moment keep up the good work guys love what you do"

"They helped me to never give up, to know who I am, to find my confidence and potential."

"To have the support I needed, because I don't have much family, they've all passed away. I could contact them whenever I needed to, and they would be there for me. They lead me in the right directions to help me as a single mom. This program is very much needed for single moms, they saved my life, because I was in a very bad place going through a divorce and I didn't know what to do".

Summary Findings & Future Opportunities

- 1. The survey response rate (again) did not reach the 75% goal.** For the third year of administering the survey, we have yet to reach the 75% goal despite using different modes and methods of administering the survey over the years.
- 2. We saw lesser rates of satisfaction in 2018 than in previous years.** Since the method of surveying, SMS or phone, seemed to impact satisfaction, this should be taken into account in understanding the results. As we expand the SMS survey program, we should continue to monitor the impact of survey privacy/anonymity on feedback.
- 3. Demographic effects on satisfaction.** Satisfaction and perceived respect varied along demographic lines. This is an area to monitor going forward and/or consider deeper dives.

Appendix A

DHSSSP 2018 Satisfaction Survey (for active clients)

Hi! Allegheny County DHS wants your feedback. Will you take a 5 minute survey to tell us about your self-sufficiency program? Msg&DataRatesMyApply Y Yes N No?

Great. We'd like to confirm that you are working with <Program name>. Is this correct? Y Yes N No

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with the service or program?
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - d. Dissatisfied
 - e. Very dissatisfied

2. Are staff respectful towards you?
 - a. Very respectful
 - b. Respectful
 - c. Neither respectful nor disrespectful
 - d. Disrespectful
 - e. Very disrespectful

3. How easy is it to get in touch with staff?
 - a. Very easy
 - b. Easy
 - c. Neither easy nor hard
 - d. Hard
 - e. Very hard

4. Did this program or service help you connect with community supports?
 - a. Very helpful
 - b. helpful
 - c. Moderately helpful
 - d. Slightly helpful
 - e. Not at all helpful

5. As a result of this program and these services, are you more prepared to meet your goals?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know

6. If yes, When you think about the services you receive, what has been most helpful in preparing you to meet your goals?

7. What barriers or challenges did you face working on your goals?

8. What does "high quality service" mean to you? Please give an example, if possible.

DHSSSP 2018 Satisfaction Survey (for closed clients)

Hi! Allegheny County DHS wants your feedback. Will you take a 5 min survey to tell us about your self-sufficiency program? StdMsg&DataRatesMayApply Y Yes N No

Great! To skip any question, reply SKIP. We'd like to confirm that you were working with @contact.agency. Is that correct? Y Yes N No

Overall, how satisfied were you with the service or program?

- A Very satisfied
- B Satisfied
- C Neither
- D Dissatisfied
- E Very dissatisfied

Did this program or service help you to connect with community supports?

- A Very helpful
- B Helpful
- C Moderately helpful
- D Slightly helpful
- E Not at all helpful

Did this program or service help you to connect with community supports?

- A Very helpful
- B Helpful
- C Moderately helpful
- D Slightly helpful
- E Not at all helpful

As a result of this program or service, are you more prepared to meet your goals?

- Y Yes
- N No
- IDK I don't know

When you think about the services you received, what has been the most helpful in preparing you to meet your goals?

CSBG 2016 Satisfaction Survey

Date: _____

Satisfaction Survey

Allegheny County Department of Human Services would like your feedback so we can make our case management, training, and job placement programs better. Your answers to this survey will be confidential, meaning that your answers will never be linked to your name. This survey is optional and your answers will not affect the services you receive. This survey will take 5 minutes.

1) Please rate your experience with [insert agency name here].

	N/A	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
a) Convenience of meeting location	<input type="checkbox"/>					
b) Customer service at meeting location	<input type="checkbox"/>					
c) Privacy of meeting space	<input type="checkbox"/>					
d) Access to computer or other technology	<input type="checkbox"/>					
e) Overall experience with the agency	<input type="checkbox"/>					

2) Please rate your experience with the staff member you work with.

	N/A	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
a) How you are treated by staff member	<input type="checkbox"/>					
b) Satisfaction with your service plan	<input type="checkbox"/>					
c) Ease of getting in touch with staff	<input type="checkbox"/>					
d) Quality of referrals and resources	<input type="checkbox"/>					
e) Overall experience with staff member	<input type="checkbox"/>					

3) Think about when you first started this program. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your satisfaction with your life when you first started this program.

<i>Extremely satisfied</i>			<i>Extremely unsatisfied</i>	
5	4	3	2	1

4) Now think about the progress you have made. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your satisfaction with your life today.

<i>Extremely satisfied</i>			<i>Extremely unsatisfied</i>	
5	4	3	2	1

5) What has been most helpful to you about this program? _____

6) What is one thing that could be improved about this program? _____

7) Would you recommend this program to family or friends?

Yes

No (Please describe why): _____

8) How long have you been participating in this program?

1 month or less

2 to 6 months

7 to 12 months

More than a year

9) In the last 30 days, how often did you meet with your case worker for this program?

Once

Twice

Three times

Four or more times

10) What is your gender?

Female

Male

Transgender

Prefer not to answer

11) What is your race? Check all that apply.

Black or African American

White

Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Other

Prefer not to answer

12) What is your ethnicity?

Hispanic or Latino

Not Hispanic or Latino

13) What is your age?

18 – 24

25 – 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 – 64

65 and older

14) Would you like to tell us anything else? _____

Thank you for your time! Your responses will help us improve this program.

Appendix B

CSBG 2017 Satisfaction Survey

Date: _____																																										
<p>2017 Client Experience Survey</p> <p>[insert agency name here]</p>																																										
<p>Allegheny County Department of Human Services would like your feedback so we can make our case management, training, and job placement programs better. Your answers to this survey will be confidential, meaning that your answers will never be linked to your name. This survey is optional and your answers will not affect the services you receive. This survey will take 5 minutes.</p>																																										
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d) Staff listened to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																																						
e) Staff respected my cultural values.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																																						
<p>3.) Please tell us about your <u>experience with the services you have received</u>.</p>																																										
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