



DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services



November 2019

2019 Case Competition generates creative ideas for human services delivery in the gig economy

For 2 1/2 days this month, 60 graduate students from Carlow, Carnegie Mellon, Chatham, Duquesne, Edinboro, Pitt and Robert Morris University worked around the clock to generate ideas for DHS's 2019 Case Competition, an event generously funded by the Human Services Integration Fund.

The students were presented with this year's challenge – human services delivery in the gig economy – at an opening reception held on November 6. The gig economy is an environment in which temporary positions are common and organizations contract with independent workers for short-term engagements. Some examples of current gig opportunities include Care.com, Uber and Lyft, Fiverr and AirBnB. Students were tasked with identifying a solution that addresses one or more community needs using gig economy strategies.

On November 9, each team presented their recommendations to a panel of judges comprised of leaders in local government, private foundations and the academic community. Each panel selected one of the teams they judged to advance to the final round, and the top teams presented to all judges in attendance.

The top four teams had varied and innovative ideas, including an app that would provide interruptions, transportation and housing for individuals experiencing intimate partner violence; an app that would track "gig work" experience and offer networking opportunities for individuals recently released from jail; and a way for individuals and locations to host mental health peer support groups in communities that need it most.

The winning idea, presented by Team Schenley, was "Waze for Good," an app that would allow community members to pick up and drop off neighbors in need at locations along the driver's normal commute. Team Schenley was comprised of Elizabeth Fries (Pitt, School of Social Work), Emily Reece (CMU, Heinz School of Public Policy) and Ben Stoviak (Carlow, School of Psychology)

Each team in the top four received a prize ranging from \$800 to \$3500.

"Every year, Case Competition participants continue to impress us – especially when you consider how little time they have to learn about the topic and create a proposal," said

Alison Wolfson, program specialist in the Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning (ATP), who organized the event. "Each year we look for a challenge that will capture the imagination, ingenuity and interest of the students, with the hope that their solutions can be applied to real problems our community faces. These students are surrounded by gig platforms in all aspects of their lives, so we knew they would bring experience and fresh thinking to the topic. We are excited to see how ideas from this year's event can be used to improve human services delivery and create better outcomes for Allegheny County residents."