

**2014 Allegheny County DHS
Local Government Case Competition:
Pathways to Safe and Affordable Housing
for People Involved in the Human Services System**



PREPARED BY
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February 2015



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The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is dedicated to meeting the human services needs of county residents, particularly the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of prevention, intervention, crisis management and after-care services.

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Published 2015 by Allegheny County DHS

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The Department of Human Services (DHS) would like to thank the judges for their time and participation, their thoughtful consideration of each proposal, and their valuable feedback to the students:

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DHS would also like to thank Marina Duane, who coordinated the Case Competition, as well as the following DHS staff, who volunteered their time and talents to ensure its success:

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Sanjeev Baidyaroy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“[The Case Competition] was a major challenge but worthwhile. I am happy that I was given this opportunity because it connected us [students] to the real world. We can get caught up in our school work and forget why we went to grad school in the first place. This gives us a chance to remember why we chose the program we are in.”

— 2014 Case Competition participant

The eighth annual Local Government Case Competition was held in November 2014. Sponsored by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) and supported by the Human Services Integration Fund¹, the annual competition is designed to engage graduate students from local universities in finding creative solutions to real-life social problems. Previous competitions have addressed a variety of issues, including how to position Allegheny County as a leader in the environmental sustainability movement; assisting the Homewood Children’s Village in designing its five-year strategic plan; addressing academic performance for students attending the Pittsburgh Public Schools who also receive services from DHS; designing ways to address stigma and improve the experiences of people living with serious mental illness; addressing the issue of suburban poverty and those affected by it; and building a human services workforce for the 21st century.

This year’s topic, Pathways to Safe and Affordable Housing for People Involved in the Human Services System, addressed housing instability. The case challenge described the shortage of appropriate and affordable housing and the ways in which housing instability impacts the lives and well-being of many DHS clients. Participants were instructed to design innovative solutions to one of three systems issues (lack of affordable housing options; limited access for people with barriers; maintaining stability and preventing crises) and one or more target populations (families with children, survivors of intimate partner violence, people experiencing chronic homelessness, youth transitioning out of foster care, people with a criminal history, people with substance use disorders, people with mental illness, people with physical disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ community [youth and/or adults]).

Sixty graduate students from five universities and 13 programs of study were divided into 16 teams that presented their proposals to four panels of judges. Judges represented local foundations, universities and community organizations, in addition to DHS.

¹ The Human Services Integration Fund was created by a group of local foundations in 1997, to support innovation and integration within DHS. Since its establishment, the Fund has provided more than \$12 million in funding that has given DHS the flexibility to implement innovative strategies for improving department operations and service quality.

The Case Competition began with an evening reception on Wednesday, November 12, 2014, at which time students were given their team assignments, were presented with the case challenge, and received background information about the challenge and about DHS. The teams worked on their proposals over the next two days, and on Saturday morning, November 15, each team presented to one of the four panels of judges. Each panel selected a winning team; after lunch, those four teams presented to the entire group of judges. Following the final presentations, the judges selected the first-, second-, third- and fourth-place winners. The first-place team won a cash prize of \$3,000; the second-place team won \$1,500; the third-place team won \$500; and fourth-place team members each received a \$25 gift card. Catering was provided by Community Kitchen Pittsburgh, a mission-driven, multi-faceted nonprofit food service that provides culinary-based, on-the-job training and support to individuals who have barriers to employment.

The winning team proposed “The Housing Stability Campaign,” a model that the judges deemed creative and innovative. The campaign incorporates a marketing strategy, in partnership with grocery stores, banks and drugstores, that uses credit/debit card processors at the ends of checkout lines to deliver facts about homelessness and consumer-focused messages. The team argued that this prevention strategy would be cost-effective, as it builds upon existing technology and would not require resource-intensive data collection and analysis. If effective, the model could be easily replicated.

The second-place team proposed a “risk pool” into which participants would each pay \$20 per month and have the opportunity to draw upon the funds in the case of a housing emergency.

The third-place team proposed a “micro-loan” program to bridge the income gap that can plunge families into homelessness.

The fourth-place team proposed a plan to encourage participants to build a savings account to provide a safety net against unexpected costs that could result in homelessness; the plan incorporated an incentive in the form of a matching fund component.

Although only four teams made it to the final round, every team identified interesting and thought-provoking strategies, including a homeless court program, job training programs, integration and streamlining of services, and mobilization of resources.

Feedback was solicited from students and judges through a survey that was completed at the end of the day. While the feedback received was primarily positive, participants provided some valuable suggestions about ways to improve the logistics and team composition. This feedback will be useful in planning for future competitions.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) celebrated its 10th anniversary. As part of that anniversary celebration, DHS instituted the Local Government Case Competition, which has become an annual event designed to engage graduate students from local universities in identifying creative solutions to difficult social problems. The Case Competition has been an ideal way to engage graduate students in community issues, make them aware of DHS's reach in the region, and encourage them to consider future employment opportunities with DHS. The Case Competition has been made possible by the continuing support of the Human Services Integration Fund, a flexible pool of funds provided by local foundations and managed by The Pittsburgh Foundation, which allows DHS to pursue opportunities that foster integration and support innovations in technology, research and programming. Since its inception in 1997, the Human Services Integration Fund has more than doubled in size and has contributed more than \$12 million to support a wide variety of innovative strategies designed to improve department operations and quality.

The first Case Competition charged students with envisioning how DHS might look on its 20th anniversary. Since then, students have been asked to come up with creative ways to position Allegheny County as a leader in the environmental sustainability movement, assist the Homewood Children's Village in designing its five-year strategic plan, address academic performance for students attending the Pittsburgh Public Schools who were also receiving services from DHS, address the issue of suburban poverty, design ways to address stigma and improve the experiences of individuals living with serious mental illness, and recruit and retain an innovative and modern human services workforce.

2014 CASE COMPETITION

Participants in the 2014 Case Competition were assigned the challenge of designing innovative solutions to housing instability, an issue that impacts many DHS clients. Functioning as a group of consultants hired by DHS, teams were encouraged to explore solutions beyond DHS through partnerships with the private, public and nonprofit sectors. Participants developed a detailed set of recommendations to address one of the following system issues and one or more of the following target populations:

System Issues:

- Lack of affordable housing options
- Limited access for people with barriers
- Maintaining stability and preventing housing crises

Target populations:

- Families with children
- Survivors of intimate partner violence
- People experiencing chronic homelessness
- Youth transitioning out of foster care
- People with a criminal history
- People with substance use disorders
- People with mental illness
- People with physical disabilities
- Members of the LGBTQ community (youth and/or adults)

Participants were assigned to teams of three or four, and given instructions on how to present their projects to the judges.

Presentations were to include specific goals and objectives, a timeline for implementation, a look at financial sustainability, measures for results/effectiveness, and an argument for why — given limited time, money and staff — their proposal should be implemented first.

Participants

Students

Sixty graduate students from five universities and 13 programs of study attended:

- **Carnegie Mellon University**
Heinz College
- **Duquesne University**
Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy
Donahue School of Business
School of Law
School of Education
- **Chatham University**
Counseling Psychology
- **University of Pittsburgh**
Graduate School of Public Health
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
Graduate School of Education
School of Social Work
School of Law
Katz Graduate School of Business
- **Ruhr University, Germany**
Social Science

Students were divided into interdisciplinary teams, based on academic program and demographic factors such as gender and race. A demographic profile of the participants follows:

- Gender
 - 45 of the students were female
 - 15 students were male

- Race
 - 28 students identified as white
 - 9 students identified as Asian or Pacific Islander
 - 9 students identified as African American/Black/African
 - 5 students identified as Hispanic
 - 9 students chose not to identify race

Judges

The competition was judged by 18 individuals representing community organizations, local universities, foundations and civic leaders. At least one DHS staff person sat on each panel. In addition to seven DHS staff members, judges represented the following:

- Allegheny HealthChoices, Inc.
- Community Human Services
- Jewish Healthcare Foundation
- Hillman Foundation
- John Heinz III College, Carnegie Mellon University
- Previous Case Competition winners
- McCauley Consulting
- Office of Mayor William Peduto
- University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work
- Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Logistics

Fifteen DHS staff members handled logistics and planning, ensuring that the event went smoothly.

Opening Reception — Wednesday, November 12, 2014

The 2014 Case Competition began with a reception catered by Community Kitchen Pittsburgh, an organization that 1) seeks to support and advance a sustainable regional food system that is financially viable, socially responsible and environmentally sound, and 2) is designed to provide culinary-based on-the-job training to individuals who have barriers to employment.

Team assignments were given to the students upon their arrival so that they had the opportunity to meet their teammates prior to hearing about the case challenge. During the reception, Adrienne Walnoha, CEO of Community Human Services, gave a keynote address in which she offered background information on the scope and causes of housing instability and shared anecdotes about the experience of being homeless in Allegheny County. The case was then introduced by Erin Dalton, DHS Deputy Director, Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation. Each student received a flash drive loaded with case materials, including information about DHS, an overview of housing issues in the United States, reports on the issue and relevant data.

Case Preparation — Wednesday, November 12 until Saturday, November 15

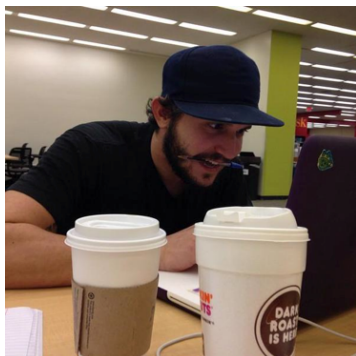
Teams had all day Thursday and Friday to research and prepare their recommendations. Presentations were due, via email, by 7 a.m. Saturday; team members were required to arrive and check in by 8 a.m. on Saturday.

Case Presentations — Saturday, November 15

The 60 students, divided into 16 teams, presented to one of the four judging panels throughout the morning; following their presentation, each team was given preliminary feedback based upon the judges' deliberations. Teams were judged on the following criteria:

- Verbal Presentation
- Technical Presentation
- Scope of Presentation
- Content of Presentation
- Q&A
- Team Demeanor
- Overall Impression of Presentation

The four winning teams (one from each panel) were announced after lunch, at which time they repeated their presentations to all 18 judges, who then deliberated and announced the winning team. The first-place team won a cash prize of \$3,000; the second-place team won \$1,500; the third-place team won \$500; and each fourth-place team member received a \$25 gift card.



New to this year's Case Competition was a Social Media Contest in which students had a chance to submit pictures of their favorite Case Competition moments. The contest drew 22 entries, which students uploaded to Twitter and Facebook with the hashtag #DHSCaseComp14.

The winning photo, left, entitled "The True Story of Four Strangers Picked to Work Together on Public Housing," was submitted by a University of Pennsylvania student to the Social Media Contest.

The Case: Pathways to Safe and Affordable Housing for People Involved in the Human Services System

Nearly 23,000 people in Allegheny County live in unstable housing as they wait for public housing. As further evidence of the need, more than a quarter of calls to DHS's resource hotline concern housing. While much has been done to address the lack of affordable housing in Allegheny County, people involved in the human services system still experience significant housing instability. A lack of affordable, stable, supportive and safe housing options significantly impedes the progress that clients are able to make in many of the programs offered through DHS.

Housing instability is not just a problem in and of itself; it can also cause or exacerbate a range of negative effects on those experiencing it. For children, housing instability is related to chronic school absenteeism and poor academic outcomes. For people struggling with substance abuse, housing challenges can contribute to relapses in recovery. Housing instability can also lead to emotional instability, poor health outcomes, difficulty maintaining a job, poor credit, negative social stigma and family breakdown.

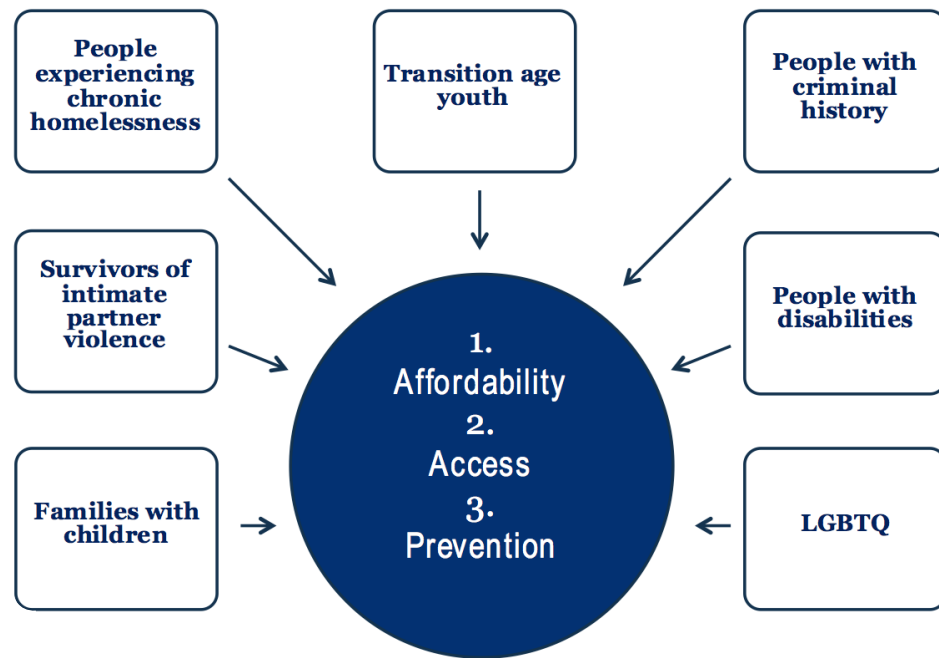
DHS has identified three main system issues that contribute to housing instability for people involved with the human services system. First, there is the inadequate supply of affordable housing options. In Allegheny County, more than two-thirds of all housing units are unaffordable to households earning less than 50 percent of Area Median Income (AMI), which is about \$25,000. Where affordable housing does exist, school districts tend to be of lower quality, public transportation is lacking, crime is higher and housing units are of poor quality. Some public housing units exist, but waiting lists are long (wait time averaged 9.2 months in 2011), and wait time for the other public assistance option, housing choice vouchers, averaged nearly three years.

The second identified system issue was limited access to housing for people with a limited work history, a criminal history, poor credit, and/or limited or fixed income. These characteristics place them at a disadvantage and make them unattractive to landlords.

The third system issue is how DHS might help people maintain housing stability and prevent crises. Preventing housing crises, rather than responding to them after the fact, causes less disruption and can have positive effects such as better education outcomes for children, preventing households from becoming transient, and fewer traumatic experiences for families. Prevention of housing crises can also result in government cost savings by decreasing shelter stays, reducing demand on the homeless system, and serving clients in systems more suited to their needs. DHS typically is not aware of people in housing crises until they are homeless, so it is important to find ways to identify people at risk and offer prevention services to them before housing crises arise.

Housing instability can be especially challenging for people who fall into the previously-listed subpopulations. These populations deserve a closer look and more targeted interventions.

FIGURE 1: Issues and Populations Involved with Housing Instability



Teams were instructed to keep a few considerations in mind while developing their plans. First, DHS funding is limited and often restricted in the kinds of programs it can support, so plans should be sustainable and make use of existing resources when possible. Second, the homelessness system is more than just DHS — proposals that addressed how a strategy could be incorporated and applicable outside of DHS (e.g., partnerships with housing providers, community development corporations [CDCs], research institutions and city authorities) might be more effective. Third, use of technology was encouraged with a reminder that DHS must comply with confidentiality and privacy laws. Finally, teams were urged to think creatively by challenging current standards and expectations.

Case Presentations

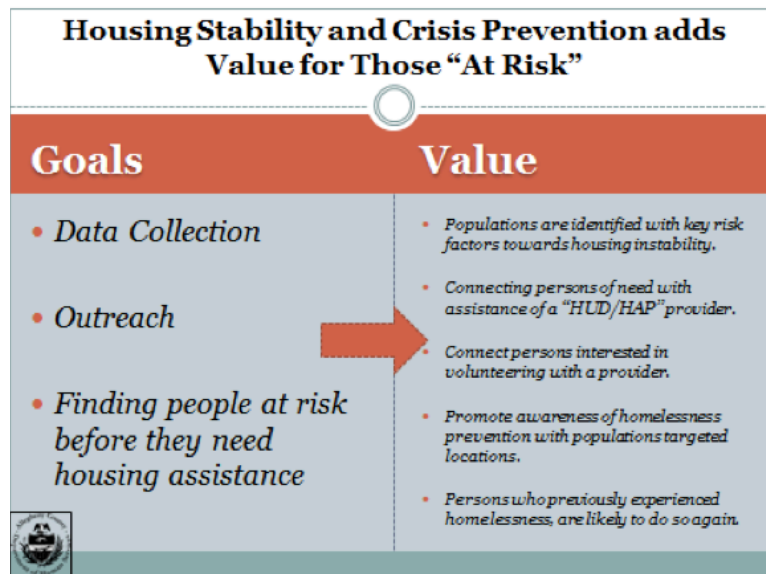
The **first-place** team proposed a way of collecting actionable data on high-risk individuals or families in order to improve housing stability and prevent crises.

The four-person team included the following students:

- Lindsay Angelo, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh
- Dominic DiNinno, Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business, University of Pittsburgh
- Janine Jelks-Seale, H. John Heinz III College of Public Policy and Management, Carnegie Mellon University
- Keeley Tague, Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy, Duquesne University

Driven by the premises that housing assistance is often reactionary rather than preventive and that few models identify those at high risk of becoming homeless, the team proposed the “Housing Stability Campaign.” The three-part plan included establishing cause-related marketing relationships, identifying high-risk individuals and families, and aligning them with the appropriate prevention support systems.

FIGURE 2: Goals of the Housing Stability Campaign



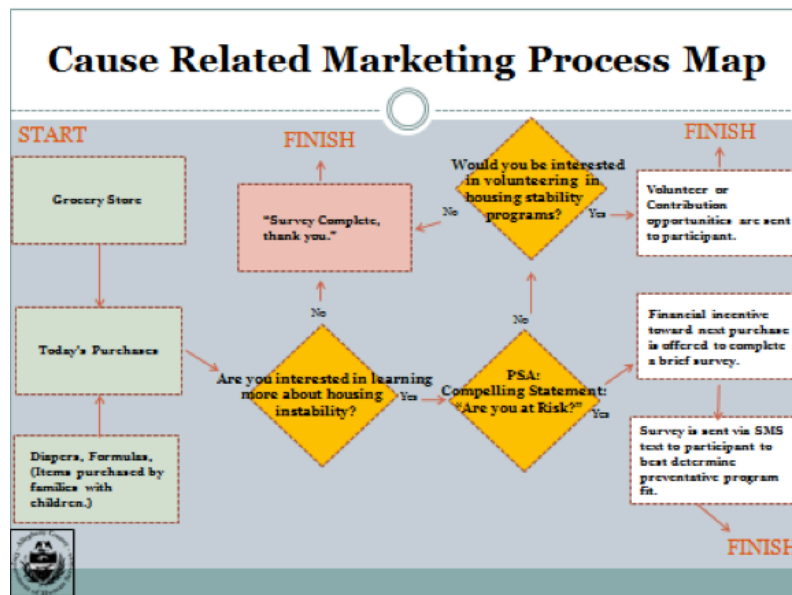
By forming partnerships with private businesses, DHS could use cause-related marketing techniques to engage people and raise awareness of both homelessness risk factors and DHS’s housing programs. How might DHS get the word out to those who need it most? The team proposed meeting people where they are — in grocery stores, banks and drugstores — using credit/debit card processors at the ends of checkout lines to deliver facts about homelessness along with messages designed to help consumers consider their potential risk. Such an approach creates a unique mode of intervention without the need for new services.

FIGURE 3: Approach to the Housing Stability Campaign



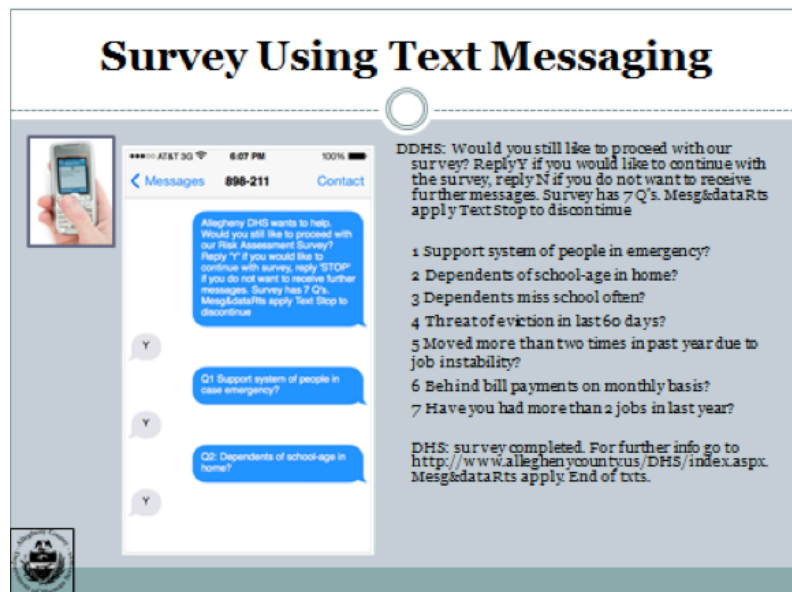
At checkout, shoppers would be asked if they want to learn more about housing instability. If yes, the shopper would answer questions to determine the presence or absence of risk factors.

FIGURE 4: Cause-Related Marketing Process



Shoppers whose responses indicate the absence of risk would be offered information about volunteer and/or contribution opportunities. Shoppers who respond “yes” to being at risk for housing instability would receive a text message survey that would gather demographics and other family information so that DHS would know what services would be most useful.

FIGURE 5: Sample Survey Text Message



The **second-place** team proposed the “Prevent” program, through which at-risk households are given the opportunity to contribute monthly to a risk fund with matching funds from DHS. In the event of a cash shortfall, participants would receive a no-interest loan from the risk pool, which would be paid directly to a landlord, utility company or other appropriate recipient. Participants in the program would also receive counseling, information about government assistance programs and financial consultation. The team suggested that such a program would have several benefits for its participants, including building credit, preventing housing crises and encouraging saving.

FIGURE 6: Loans Provided by the “Prevent” Program

Loans

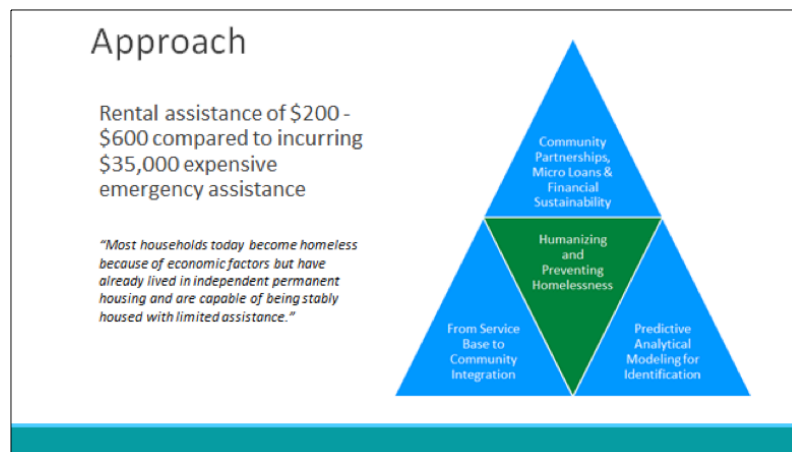
- * Deducted from principal + matching
- * Matched repayment + **counseling**
 - * Basic payment plan using monthly dues
- * Nonpayment forgiveness
- * Suggested acceptable loan reasons:
 - * unemployment, injury, illness, utility
 - * emergency expenses- as they relate to housing stability

\$ 600 (rent) - \$600 (loan)= 0

Person stays in home!

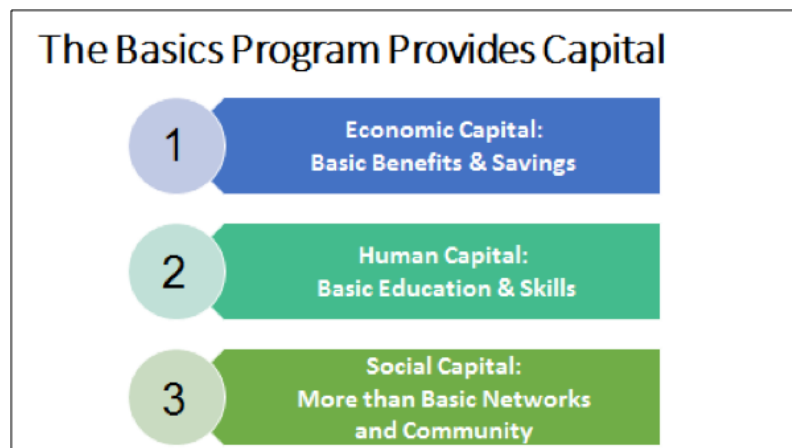
The **third-place** team also focused on providing loans to those at risk for homelessness. Called the “Micro-Loan Model,” the program would develop and implement a predictive tool to identify individuals and families before they become homeless. Those at risk would be given small no-interest loans that would be generated through crowd sourcing (50 percent) and DHS donation (50 percent). All participants would receive case management services to help them work toward greater housing stability.

FIGURE 7: Micro-Loan Model



The **fourth-place** team developed a plan called “The Basics Program,” which set forth a strategy based around a fund to assist families with expenses for everyday items such as toiletries, soap and paper products. Participants in the program would be encouraged to save what they would have spent on these basic necessities, and their savings would be matched by DHS. Participants would also work one-on-one with a case manager and attend financial literacy workshops.

FIGURE 8: Benefits of The Basics Program



The winning presentations can be found in their entirety at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/casecompetition.aspx>

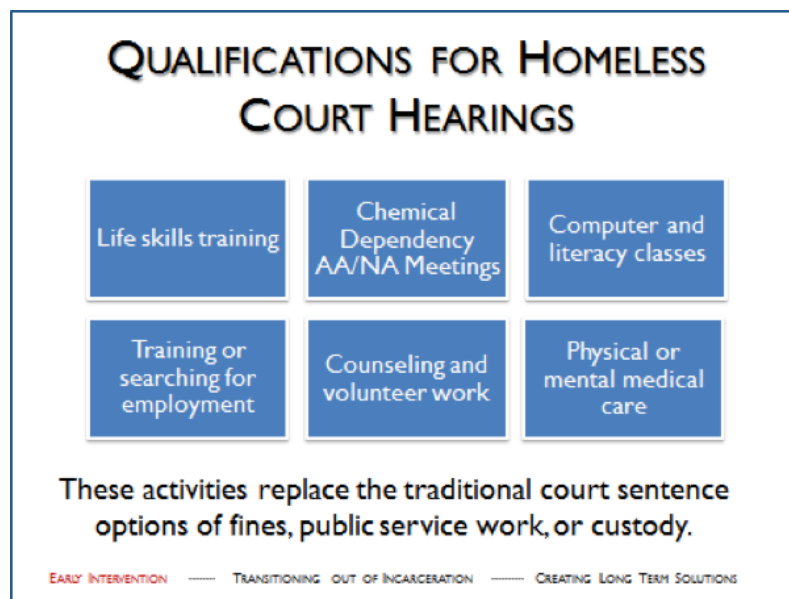
Other Recommendations

The other teams proposed a variety of compelling strategies to address the issue of housing instability for people in the human services system. These included a homeless court program, job training programs, integration of services and mobilization of resources.

Development of a Homeless Court Program

One team proposed launching a pilot Homeless Court Program, a model that has been successful in other jurisdictions around the country. Those who are homeless often experience additional barriers in the justice system and receive citations for breaking laws that are due to their homelessness. The model employs alternative sentencing with a focus on rehabilitation. By volunteering to participate in the program, clients are able to improve their criminal record and have certain violations removed.

FIGURE 9: Qualifications for Homeless Court Hearings



Job Training

Since economic stability directly relates to housing stability, many teams identified the need for job support for at-risk people. Suggestions for such programs came in many forms, from internships for youth transitioning out of the foster care system to apprenticeships with local businesses and specialized training in sustainable construction.

FIGURE 10: Providing Job Skills

Goal 1

Providing the professional skills necessary for maintaining stable employment and preventing job loss.

Objectives:

- 1.1. By the end of the four-year program, 75% of participants will achieve computer proficiency in Microsoft Office.
- 1.2. Through a weekly corporate internship, program participants will gain communication, networking, and problem-solving skills.

Integration of Services

Several teams mentioned the importance of integrating services for people at risk of homelessness. In addition to housing, services such as mental health care, nutrition assistance, career and education support, and drug and alcohol programs are all necessary to improve housing stability and are most effective when they are integrated and easy to access.

FIGURE 11: Comprehensive Services for People with Housing Instability

Comprehensive Services

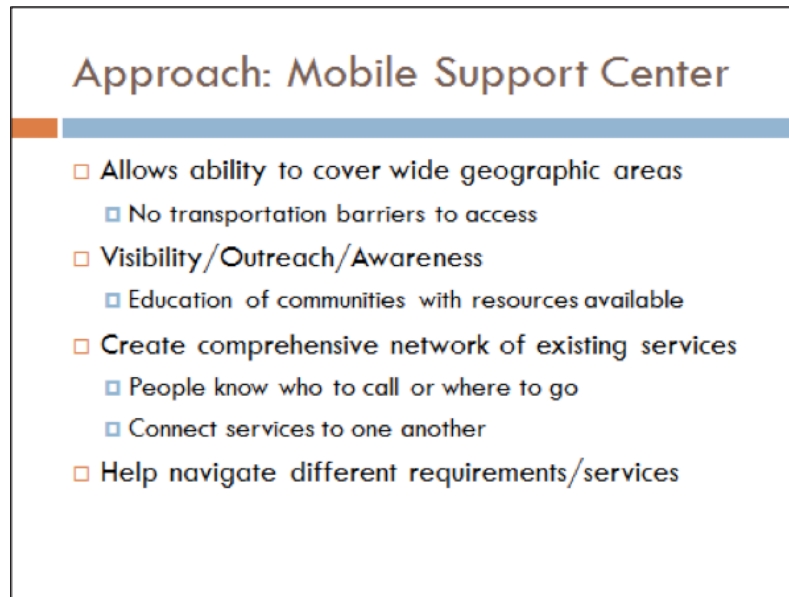
- In order to prevent crisis, adequate supports must be provided to ensure that people remain successfully housed:
 - Mental health care/counseling
 - Nutrition Assistance
 - Food Stamps
 - Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
 - Job Assistance
 - Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Educational Opportunities
 - Career link(GED)
 - Drug/Alcohol Abuse Supports
 - DHS
 - Assistance programs
 - Lifeline phone service
 - State health insurance: Medi cald/CHIP
 - Public transportation: Allegheny County Port. Authority
 - Companionship
 - Humane Society



Mobilization of Resources

Teams recognized the need for bringing information and services directly to people who may be at risk. One team proposed a mobile support center that would help DHS to raise awareness among potential clients without the barriers of transportation and geographic location.

FIGURE 12: Mobile Support Center



Another team also suggested mobilization of resources, in this case in the form of a bus that would travel to different locations and offer preliminary case management services as well as food, blankets and seasonal beds.

FIGURE 13: Allegheny Residency in Transit (ART) Bus



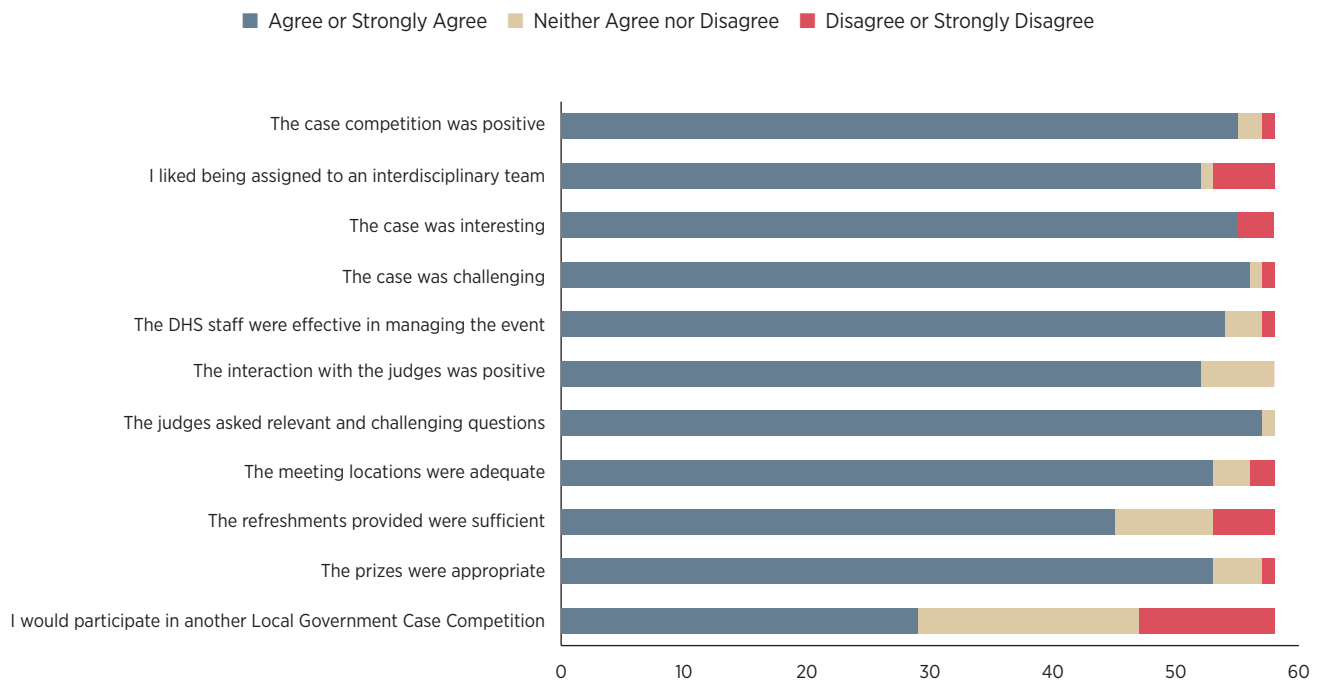
SURVEY RESULTS

Feedback was solicited from students and judges through a survey that they were asked to complete at the end of the day. This feedback, in the form of responses to specific questions as well as open-ended comments, will be used to inform possible modifications to the design of the next Case Competition.

Student Feedback

Surveys completed by this year’s participants indicated that most (95 percent) had a positive experience and appreciated the opportunity to be a part of the Case Competition.

TABLE 1: Survey Responses — Students



In addition to the above survey results, student comments were reviewed. The most positive comments were related to the opportunity to work within a multidisciplinary team. Students were complimentary about the planning, logistics and staffing of the event.

Logistically, many students continue to struggle to find sufficient time to meet, and while we deliberately create a scenario that is intensive and time-limited, we acknowledge the difficulty of accomplishing the task in such a concentrated period of time. However, the quality of the presentations indicates that motivated and passionate students can accomplish a lot in a short time.

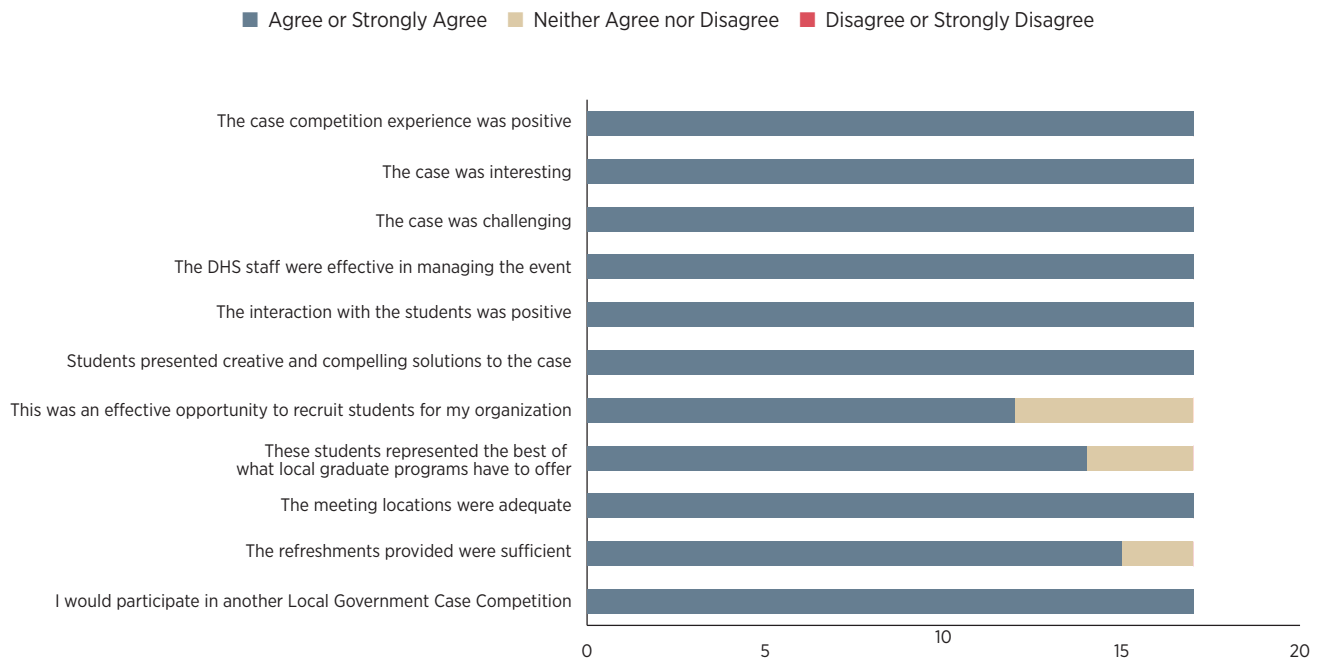
As has been the case in previous years, what was positive for some students was negative for others (e.g., group dynamics and case topic). Student comments are taken seriously and considered during planning for subsequent competitions.

For a complete list of student comments, see the **Appendix** on page 20 of this report.

Judges’ Feedback

The judges’ comments were overwhelmingly positive (see **Appendix**, page 23). **Table 2** demonstrates that, overall, the judges found the case challenge to be interesting, were impressed with the students and enjoyed the experience.

TABLE 2: Survey Responses — Judges



CONCLUSION

Housing instability in Allegheny County is a complex issue with many intersecting challenges. In response, participants in the Case Competition presented innovative and nuanced ideas that will be taken into consideration by DHS. Based on the relevance of the information gathered, and judging from the formal and informal feedback received, the 2014 Case Competition can be considered a success. It will continue to be our practice to consider comments and suggestions, both positive and negative, as we plan for future competitions.

APPENDIX: SURVEY FEEDBACK

Student Comments

- It was my first experience with a case comp. It was a major challenge but worthwhile. I am happy that I was given this opportunity because it connected us students to the real world. We can get caught up in the school work and forget why we went to grad school in the first place. This gives us a chance to remember why we are in the program we are in.
- Loved the case and everyone at DHS!
- It's been a fun/informational/educational experience!
- It was helpful that ACDHS provided "paths" groups could go down, i.e. three different issues with homelessness and target populations, rather than a vague challenge of eradicating/addressing homelessness.
- Are judges made aware of information given to participants, specifically with regard to focus? Participants were told not to worry about a budget but judges requested one in feedback.
- Would it be possible to offer space in DHS for group meetings? We ran into issues finding public places for meetings open after 12 AM.
- Having such a wide breadth of issues to tackle (various systems and target populations) made settling on a topic difficult and time consuming. Would prefer a more straight-forward, uniform case.
- Good experience, some real world experience, shows me what I may have to face if I get into local government. It was a challenging issue that is not easy to tackle.
- Thank you so much! Really enjoyed it.
- Excellent management of in-team issues. Staff is welcoming and concerned.
- My particular team was not very interdisciplinary.
- Interaction with judges was very limited.
- Onsite parking was very helpful.
- Food selection was a bit odd. Foods did not go together. Not enough on Wednesday.
- This was my first case. Given the time commitment, I can see why second years do not participate again. I would choose a different opportunity the second year.
- Did not have the opportunity to meet students from other schools outside my group.
- Holding pitch day on Saturday is helpful.
- Would have been helpful to communicate process for accessing internet/wifi at various universities.
- Well-organized case.
- Volunteers did a wonderful job directing groups.

Appendix*(continued)*

- Challenging case, but rewarding.
- Possibility to increase division group from four to five or six to decrease delay time while waiting for other groups to finish.
- The egg soufflés were a bit tiring after two meals in a row. Maybe more variety since people don't eat well while working so hard on the competition.
- Communication and directions were clear throughout the competition, which really made a positive impact.
- The judges had great attitudes and constructive feedback.
- Very tiring process, especially for grad students, but worthwhile, especially with people from different schools.
- Overall, very positive experience!
- If it was a week or two earlier in the semester that would have been better. It's getting a bit too close to finals.
- Increase diversity of educational backgrounds.
- Great job! I enjoyed the experience working in a very diverse team. I like how the competition was set up in such an open way that it did not limit our creativity, I got a great kick out of it!
- I really enjoyed the program and especially appreciated the flash drive and the information on it. I would possibly consider providing some printouts of the PowerPoint for the PowerPoint presentation. Maybe have an alum from last year come back and show how the competition affected them, helped them, etc.
- I wish there was a way to rate your group member involvement in the preparation of the case.
- The Case Competition timing is sufficient.
- I really appreciated this opportunity to challenge my teamwork, organizational and creative skills. It was a pleasure working with competent, talented people to produce an ambitious and worthy project. If I wasn't so tired I would sign up for another competition right now.
- I'm glad I participated. I encourage others to do so. I welcome a real life opportunity to work on a difficult problem — but I want to do it in real time next time!
- The meeting room for the event was very crowded, so if there was a bigger space that would be good.
- I like the twitter competition.
- We should get a food stipend for when we are meeting with our teams during the prep time.
- I had a great experience!
- Because the three systems and target populations are so different, it's hard to really compare ideas.

Appendix*(continued)*

- Too tired to comment! Thank you for the opportunity!
- Thank you for the experience!
- I enjoyed the whole process. It's challenging and positive and the framework of the case competition is good. Definitely a good event.
- When we were introduced to the case, we did not know what DHS had already achieved or thought of, what worked/didn't work for you. If you could give us examples of what you tried and projects underway, that would have narrowed it down for us.
- Give us money for participating.
- I would recommend having the competition earlier in the school year or over the summer.
- Maybe provide more information on DHS and its structure and budget.
- The case competition was organized well, but if we could have more background information about the case and the limitations or things we don't need to address, that would be better. For international students who may not be familiar with the background and culture, I think it would be nice to solve this "obstacle."
- I would recommend holding the case competition earlier in the school year. Thanksgiving break is one week away and finals/papers are near.
- The strongest aspect of this competition was the immediate feedback. I also appreciated the judges' genuine interest in the case. Random assignment of the team was also a wonderful component. I think the social media contest was an interesting and fun aspect — it gave us an opportunity to get relief from the intensity of the case! Despite the outrageous lack of sleep, I would feel very inclined to participate in an event like this again. The support through the two days from DHS staff was very helpful also.
- Thank you! I liked that we got to meet people from other disciplines and schools — it was helpful pulling in knowledge from different areas to propose a solution to a complex issue.
- Very challenging, but a lot of fun. I'm not sure that I would want to do this more than once, but I enjoyed the experience.
- We felt that we should have the opportunity to write responses to some of the judges' feedback. We found we may not have been as clear as we thought in an explanation and having the chance to write a better description of our plan would be beneficial.
- Never again! I'm too old to lose this much sleep!
- Interdisciplinary teams were a great idea. I liked the matching as every individual/member contributed well.
- I think it would be great if judges gave each presenter some comments. International students pay more attention to the performance during the presentation and it would be wonderful if we could have some feedback about it.
- The problem presented was engaging and encouraged members of the team to approach it in ways that were both conscientious and intelligent.

Appendix*(continued)*

- Students are tired and post-lunch comments are too long.
- Thanks for the learning experience. Some recommendations:
 - Earlier in the semester
 - More time? A week?
 - More narrow topic: we were expected to know a lot about DHS in a very short time frame
- Enthusiasm and positivity of DHS staff who coordinated and helped with the event was very encouraging

Judge Comments

- Greater variety of refreshments was needed.
- This is always fun, stimulating and a great opportunity to engage young professionals in our community.
- Thank you for inviting me.
- I enjoyed the opportunity to participate in this innovative competition for graduate students. Their thoughtfulness and cross-disciplinary approaches to presenting and creating new programs show teamwork and engagement.
- Fantastic!! The complexity of the responses was not always present. Wonder if one more day would help.
- Great experience — very well run. The ideas we saw were feasible, creative and well-presented.
- Great experience! I will be back.