



# Allegheny County

## Department of Human Services

### Marc Cherna, Director

### Office of Community Relations

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

Event and Donations Team: 412-350-3428

2020

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### 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 and interfaces in an optimum way with all with all stakeholders, internal and external to DHS, about the department – its services and programs; mandates; policies and practices; initiatives and events –through a variety of communications platforms and engagement strategies. 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 AmeriCorps KEYS program, and the Event and Donations Team.

In 2016, OCR also became responsible for much of DHS's recruitment efforts of caseworkers and other staff members. This includes maintaining a presence at regional colleges and universities and at area employment fairs to discuss careers in child welfare casework and share information on the civil service exam.

### 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

- 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.

*Research Reports* are evaluations and assessments of our programs and services produced by the Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning, 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 can 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](mailto: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.

**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), in partnership with the National Council of Jewish Women, 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 qualifying students to receive a free tuxedo rental

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) has been 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. CCN became a biennial event starting in 2018.

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](http://www.facebook.com/acdhs)), Twitter ([www.twitter.com/acdhs](http://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> .