2019 Allegheny County
Annual Local Government Case Competition:
Human Service Delivery in the Gig Economy

December 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Each year, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) hosts a competition for local graduate students. Generously funded by the Human Services Integration Fund,[1] the competition challenges interdisciplinary teams of students to learn about a problem facing local government and develop innovative solutions, which they present to a panel of judges.

2019 marked the 13th year that DHS has hosted the Case Competition. This year's topic, "Human Service Delivery in the Gig Economy," challenged students to identify a community need and develop an innovative solution using gig strategies. Students submitted creative solutions to a wide variety of relevant issues including isolated seniors, affordable temporary housing, mentoring/tutoring and supports for single mothers.

Fifty-eight students representing seven local universities and nine different programs of study participated in this year's competition. Judges from local foundations, universities, nonprofits and government agencies, as well as entrepreneurs with subject matter knowledge, volunteered their time and expertise to judge the competition and provide feedback to students.

THE COMPETITION

In 2007, DHS celebrated its 10th anniversary. As part of that anniversary celebration, DHS instituted the Local Government Case Competition, which has become an annual event. The Case Competition has been an ideal way to give graduate students an opportunity to connect what they are learning in school with real social issues. It also encourages students to consider careers in the public sector; in fact, several past participants have gone on to hold internships and jobs with DHS, the City of Pittsburgh and other local nonprofits.

As in past years, this year's Case Competition commenced with a reception on a Wednesday at which team assignments were made and the topic was announced. Following an introduction by DHS Director Marc Cherna, students and judges heard case-framing remarks from Leah Lizarondo, Co-Founder and CEO of 412 Food Rescue. The case was then introduced by DHS Deputy Director Erin Dalton.

Student teams spent Wednesday evening through Saturday morning researching, brainstorming and preparing their recommended solutions. On Saturday, the teams gave 20-minute presentations to one of four panels of judges and were judged on the innovation, impact, creativity and feasibility of their solutions, as well as their teamwork and oral and visual presentation. The top team from each panel moved on to the final round, in which teams repeated their presentations to all judges and were then awarded prizes for first through fourth place.

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1   The Human Services Integration Fund is a group of local foundations that provide flexible funding to DHS for projects that foster integration and support innovation.

THE 2019 CASE

This year's challenge recognized the explosive growth of the gig economy – an environment in which temporary positions are common and providers contract with independent workers for short-term engagements which can benefit workers, businesses and consumers by making work more adaptable to the needs of the moment and demand for flexible lifestyles. Considering the prevalence of this new gig economy, students were asked to choose a community need and identify a solution that addresses that need outside of established systems, using gig economy strategies. Keynote speaker, Leah Lizarondo explained her creation of 412 Food Rescue, an app that harnesses the power of thousands of volunteers (food rescue heroes) to save extra food from donors such as restaurants, caterers and supermarkets, and deliver it to senior centers, shelters and those in need, thereby preventing food waste, feeding the hungry and lessening the burden on landfills.

THE WINNING SOLUTIONS

The four finalist teams offered a variety of recommendations addressing problems stemming from lack of transportation, behavioral health needs, incarceration and domestic violence.

Other solutions included harnessing volunteers with a variety of expertise to meet needs related to hunger, aging and isolation, and more.

See **Appendix A** for a summary of all proposed solutions.

① Waze for Good — Driving Change in Allegheny County

"Waze for Good" envisions a community in which the barrier of transportation is removed, and all Allegheny County residents can access the services necessary to reach their full potential. The team proposed a partnership between the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and WAZE Carpool to bridge the county's transportation gap. Through slight modifications to the current WAZE Carpool platform, the service would connect volunteer drivers with residents in need of transportation to social service and/or doctor's appointments, school, work, grocery stores and more. The service would be free to riders.

FIGURE 1: "Waze for Good"
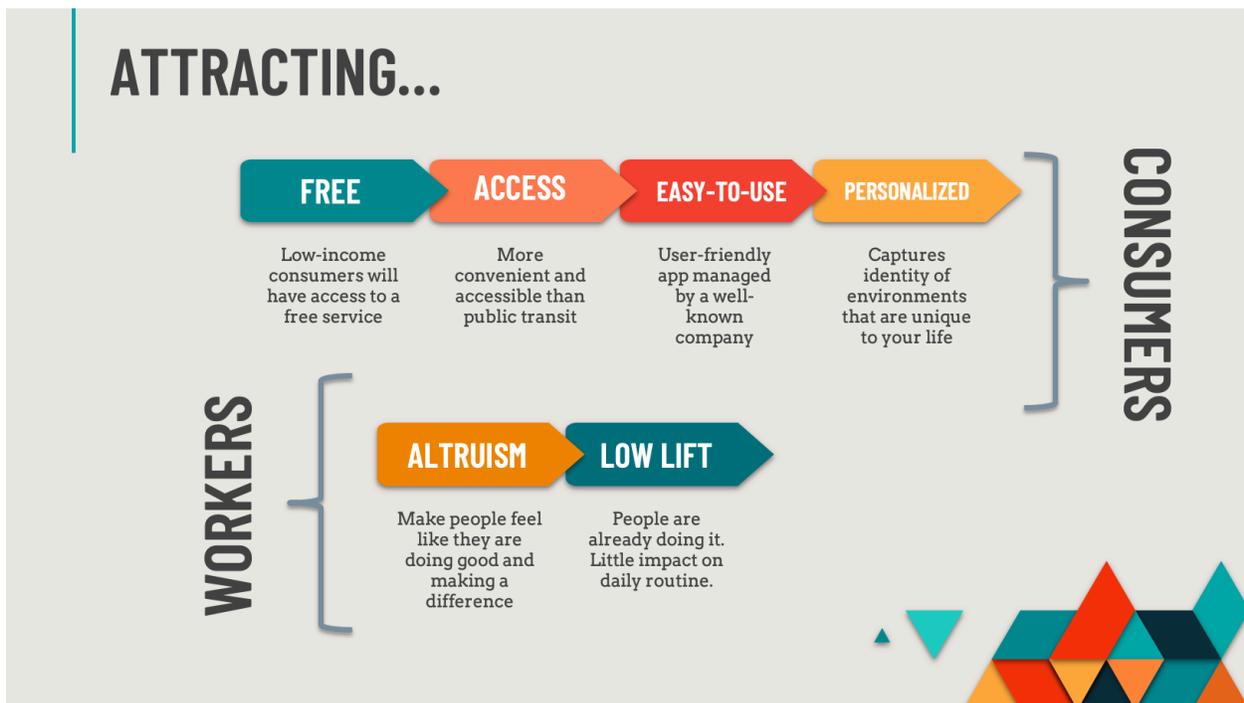
2 Allegheny County Peer Support Program

"Allegheny County Peer Support Program (ACPSP)" seeks to provide peer support for county residents who have trouble accessing current support services or feel socially isolated. ACPSP achieves this by bringing together people looking for social support for diverse problems with a trained peer support group facilitator where they are. By creating and disbanding groups where and when needed, this model conserves resources and provides greater access to the most vulnerable.

FIGURE 2: Allegheny County Peer Support Program
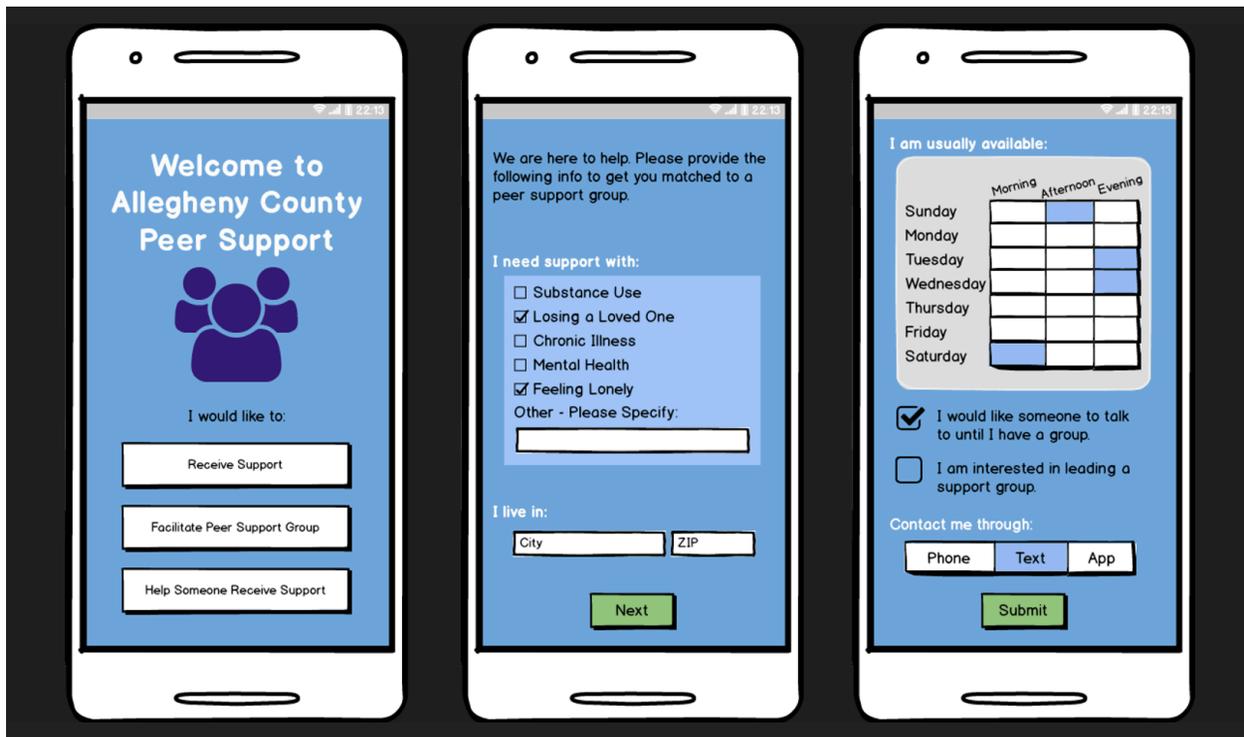
③ Gig to Great

"Gig to Great" proposes an online platform for former offenders to use as they embark on a self-directed path to reintegration through the gig economy. The platform is meant to be a centralized place for users to build a profile and log their work experiences, contact DHS and its partners for general support, and network with each other and prospective employers. The platform will aggregate work history and begin building a portfolio that can be used as the foundation of a resumé and a pitch to formal employers. The proposal is based on the idea that working in the gig economy requires initiative, and bringing evidence of self-directed work, despite the challenges former offenders face, will do much to dispel employer apprehension.

FIGURE 3: Gig to Great
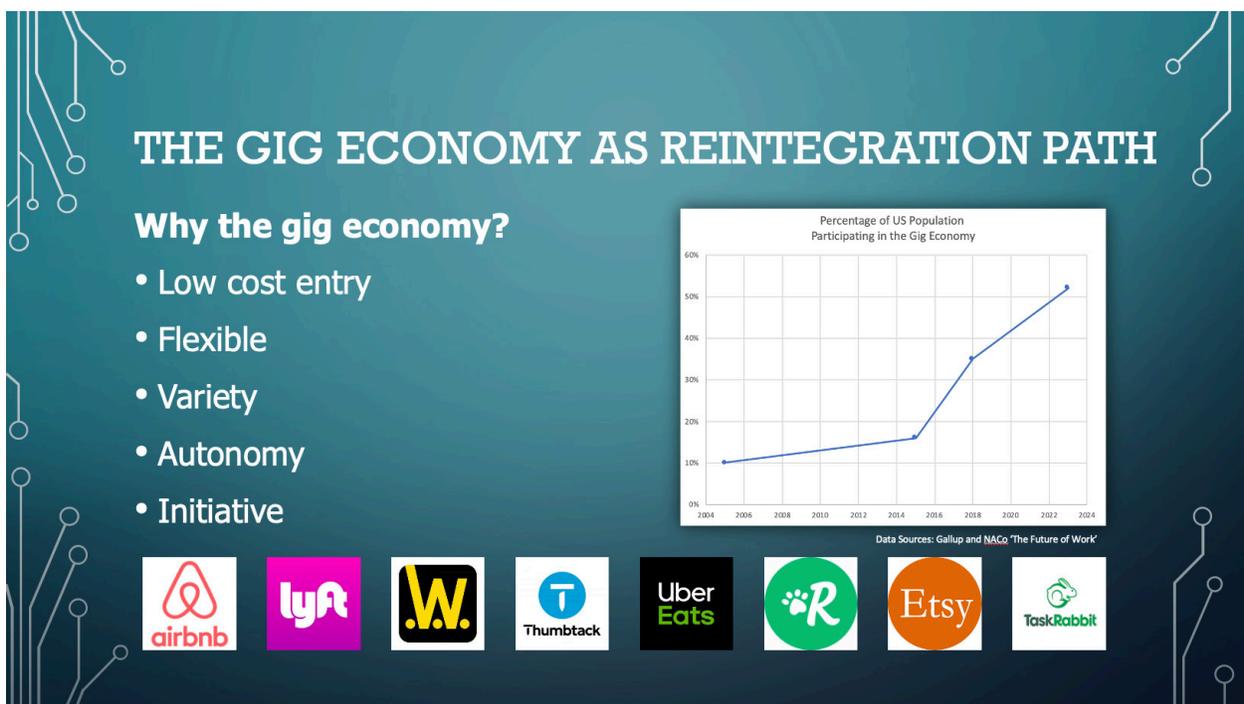
4 Count on Me

"Count on Me" addresses domestic violence as a public health issue, providing a safety net for domestic violence survivors. The app equips community members to diffuse dangerous situations. It is a secret app, designed to look like a calculator, that would use an alert network, GPS and Lyft/Uber/Airbnb-like services to provide short-term, emergency transportation and shelter to individuals escaping domestic violence. These individuals would have pre-programmed safe numbers, blocked contacts and the ability to journal about incidents within the application.

FIGURE 4: Count on Me

Ansley, Bechdel, Geisler, McKenzie | Swinburne | Local Government Case Competition | November 9, 2019
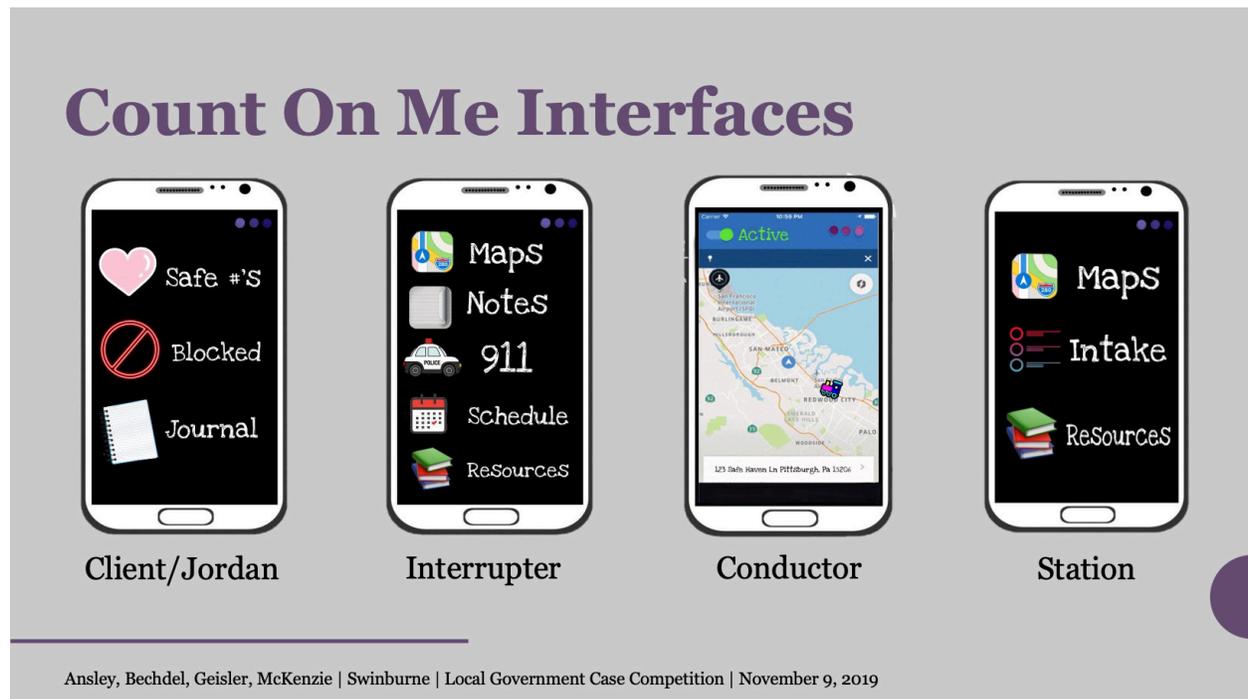
CONCLUSION

The goal of the Local Government Case Competition is twofold: to elicit ideas that the County and judges from partner organizations seriously consider using in our work; and to expose talented students to the breadth and importance of real world challenges, with the hopes of enticing them to pursue careers in local government.

As anticipated, the students presented many inspired and innovative solutions that incorporated gig strategies as solutions that can be applied to bolster ongoing initiatives. Hearing fresh perspectives on human services challenges encourages new and creative thinking about problems, resulting in innovative solutions to improve the lives of Allegheny County citizens.

While the next annual Case Competition may look different due to COVID-19 precautions, we plan to hold it again in the future for graduate students interested in learning more about the public sector and contributing to the work of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF ALL TEAMS' PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
[1st place] Schenley **Elizabeth Fries** *University of Pittsburgh* *SSW, Public Administration* **Emily Reece** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM, Data Analytics* **Ben Stoviak** *Carlow University* *Student Affairs and* * Professional Counseling*	**Waze for Good — Driving Change in Allegheny County** Waze for Good envisioned a community where the barrier of transportation is removed, and all residents can access the services necessary to reach their potential by partnering DHS and WAZE Carpool to bridge the County's transportation gap. Through slight modifications to the current WAZE platform, the free service would connect volunteer drivers with residents needing transport to appointments, school, work, grocery stores, etc.
[2nd place] Fort Duquesne **Megan Arden** *University of Pittsburgh MPH* **Nathan Deron** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Xinyuan Zheng** *University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPA*	**Allegheny County Peer Support Program (ACPSP)** The ACPSP targets residents who have trouble accessing current support services or feel socially isolated. ACPSP matches people looking for social support for diverse problems with a trained peer support group facilitator nearby. By creating and disbanding groups where and when needed, this model conserves resources and provides greater access to the most vulnerable
[3rd place] Hot Metal **Sydney Joseph** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Daniel Schnelbach** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Kayla Whitehouse** *University of Pittsburgh* *GISPIA, MPA* **Daisia Williams** *University of Pittsburgh* *SSW, MSW*	**Gig to Great** Gig to Great proposes a platform for ex-offenders as they embark on a path to reintegration. The platform is a centralized place for users to: build a profile and log their gig work experiences; contact DHS and partners for general support; and network with each other and prospective employers. The platform aggregates work history builds a portfolio and serves as the foundation of a resumé.

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
[4th place] Swinburne **Shameika Ansley** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Joshua Bechdel** *Chatham University* *MS, Psychology* **Grace Geisler** *University of Pittsburgh, SSW, MSW* **Emily McKenzie** *Duquesne University* *School of Law, JD*	**Count on Me** Count on Me, a secret app designed to look like a calculator, uses an alert network, GPS, Lyft/Uber/Airbnb-like services to provide short-term, emergency transportation and shelter to individuals escaping domestic violence. These individuals would have pre-programmed safe numbers, blocked contacts, and journal about incidents. Count on Me utilizes three roles: An **Interrupter**, contacted by survivor in active domestic violence situation, would create a distraction from the incident. The interrupter is trained to diagnose the severity of the situation and decide if and when an escape route is appropriate. A **Conductor**, contacted by the interrupter, would fulfill the Lyft/Uber role, and transport the survivor to a **Station**, which is a safe house, like Airbnb.
Andy Warhol **Ling Guo** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Alie Iwanenko** *Duquesne University, School of Law* **Jamila Jordan** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Alex Romeo** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA*	**InterGen: Skills & Social Exchange** This solution uses the gig economy to provide a match-making service between independent seniors (65+) and young adults (18–34) through an intuitive, easy-to-use platform. The platform matches two parties: the service-seeking "consumers" (seniors) with service providers (adults 18–34). Users set up a profile that includes skills desired and skills offered. Users swipe, make a skills-match, and meet up. After the meet up, senior participants rate the experience, which allows greater transparency for future matches. The service simply connects the college students or paid professionals with seniors. InterGen empowers seniors and adults to decide on an activity that is meaningful to both parties during a time and place, setting the terms they choose.

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
Bloomfield **Sean Hudson** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPA* **Sarah Palmer** *Chatham University* *MA, Psychology* **Sindija Sriskanda** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Shuro Zheng** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPA*	**Linking Doctors to Victims of Domestic Violence** This solution offers medical and mental health services to Allegheny County residents who are experiencing domestic violence and need aid. Victims anonymously make a request through phone or an online form, requesting the date and location of the meeting, and DHS will match them to volunteer doctors, nurses and mental health professionals. Victims would be asked for a preferred first name, best contact information, needed medical qualifications, whether a policeman needs to be present and any additional comments. The app allows medical professionals who are willing to volunteer their time to see any available requests that are sent by DHS, and to accept the appointment. The victim and at least two medical professionals would meet at the preferred location provided by the victim to perform services including sexual forensic exam, STD testing and mental health check ins. This plan is designed to eliminate emotional and knowledge barriers of asking for assistance and will benefit individuals who are not ready to go through the legal process or visit overcrowded medical centers.
Fort Pitt **Mychaela Austin** *University of Pittsburgh* *MPH* **Demitra Kourtzidi**s *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Yingzi Liu** *University of Pittsburgh* *MPA* **Premkumar Loganathan** *Carnegie Mellon University* *MSPPM*	**Skillshare — Where the Community Develops Itself** SkillShare is an app that matches volunteer trainers with clients by location and skill. Clients will work with human services case workers to identify skills they need to develop to advance their careers and set up their SkillShare account. Volunteers will complete an intake to assess qualifications and set up their SkillShare account, including selecting their preferred locations (nearby libraries). Both types of user will input the genders with which they are comfortable meeting, profile pictures and a fun fact about them to create a sense of familiarity.

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
Glenwood **Mush Chowdhury** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz MSPPM* **Medha Kadri** *University of Pittsburgh* *MSW* **Kayla Reiman** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz MSPPM* **Corinne Taylor** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPA*	**Eight to Great: Preparing the present for the future** Eight to Great builds on the evidence that short, high-touch interventions from experts can have long-term impacts. Eight to Great provides a unique contribution via mobilizing the gig economy, which is useful for bridging a disconnect between resources and needs via short interventions. Tech workers who sign up for the program can provide short-term assistance with different students on the following: • **STEM exposure:** visiting a tech company via a job shadow in high school can provide students insights into their potential future jobs. • **College applications:** FAFSA help, edits to applications and assistance navigating the process of obtaining fee waivers can help students enter college. • **College support:** Pep talks and course advice can help students persist. • **Career advice:** Interview prep, resume edits and career planning can help students transition from college into the tech industry, ultimately joining Pittsburgh's tech workforce. • **Tech for skills:** Help navigating MOOCS etc. can assist participants in gaining new skills.
Highland Park **Gianna Donati** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPIA* **Ciera Payne** *University of Pittsburgh* *MSW* **Sarah Perry** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Brian Rhindress** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM*	**Sense of Stability (S.O.S)** S.O.S. is a helpline designed to offer support to people who might not otherwise access mental health services. Clients access the S.O.S. platform to submit a request. Volunteers, known as Navigators, are scheduled for shifts on the platform and receive client requests. Navigators then access a database of potential resources and make contact to find out which providers have available services or appointments. The client receives a list of possible solutions within 48 hours and a Navigator follows up a week later to confirm they were able to schedule services. Cases are considered complete once the client has scheduled an appointment.

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION

McKees Rocks
 	
Eloisa Avila
Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSPPM
 	
Natalia Goodnow
University of Pittsburgh GSPIA
 	
Tina Harris
University of Pittsburgh MSW
	Join the Clique: A Sustainable Community-Based Support System for Single Mothers
	
	Join the Clique provides a service for emergency or planned needs without stigma because it is a platform for and by the target population. Join the Clique operates on a barter system. The platform will comprise of single mothers as givers and receivers of services and goods, optimizing the community's available time and resources.
	
	Each user will create a profile with basic information, indicate their available time and post services or goods they could provide (so they can be *Givers*) to the community board. Each user will receive 1,000 community points when they join, that they will later trade for goods and services (as *Receivers*).
	
	  • *Receivers* will select the service/good they need with few clicks.
	
	  • *Givers* will receive a notification during their available time, when there is the need of services/goods they agreed to offer.

Panther Hollow **Jake M. Harrison** *Duquesne University School of Law J.D.* **Elizabeth Hernandez** *University of Pittsburgh GSPIA — MPA* **Natasha Nunez** *Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSPPM*	**Doorways to Dignity** Doorways to Dignity reinvigorates homes of those who are not homeless, but rather those who are forced into unsafe and demoralizing situations of domestic abuse, who trade sexual favors for housing, or otherwise live in a state of fear or housing uncertainty. It creates a solution that allows women to become tenants for as long as they need before they can transition to permanent housing. Utilizing the app "Hardhat Heroes," Doorways to Dignity will recruit volunteers such as construction workers, technical school apprentices, hobbyists and others, as well as receive donated materials from community partners, to renovate structurally sound homes that are salvageable, or to demolish unsafe properties, replacing them with modular prefabricated storage container homes.

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
Rankin **Kate Gascoine** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPA* **Alisar Mustafa** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM* **Deanna Supancic** *Edinboro University* *MSW* **Lee Schazz** *Chatham University* *MS, Psychology*	**Yinzhouse** Yinzhouse envisions a community where everyone in Allegheny County has access to safe housing every night of the year. By utilizing technology and the community, Yinzhouse will provide a direct transaction between consumers and providers to improve individuals overall mental, physical and emotional well-being. Yinzhouse is an easy-to-use app that can locate temporary housing for individuals or families in need. The app connects hosts who are willing to open the doors of their homes to community members in need.
Veterans **Brianna Bell** *University of Pittsburgh* *School of Law, JD* **Brittany Chamberlin** *University of Pittsburgh* *MSW-MPH* **Mike Dubinski** *University of Pittsburgh MSW* **Khadija Rashid** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz, MSPPM*	**Forged Alliances** Forged Alliances seeks to provide valuable services — both paid and voluntary — that utilize the gig economy to bring together younger and older adults in a mutually-beneficial way. The mutual need for community connections among young and old, paired with the mutually beneficial need for odd-job services among many older adults, offer an exciting opportunity for younger people to provide valuable services and earn wages. The service includes a phone number, web page and an app by which young and old can easily interact and engage with each other. Callers can seek jobs or home task completion services and be paired with someone who can provide it — whether shoveling snow or offering companionship. Paid home labor tasks are outlined in a contractual fee-for-service list with predetermined fair pricing. The platform also hosts a social engagement and connections component that posts public community events for which all users, older or youth, may register.
West End **Lingzi Liu** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPA* **Kristen Patton** *Duquesne University* *School of Law, JD* **Ye Tian** *Carnegie Mellon University* *Heinz MSPPM* **Chukwudi Udeani** *Carnegie Mellon University* *School of Engineering, Ph.D.*	**Senior Citizens: Connections and Community** Often seniors feel sadness or frustration at not being able to handle the "little things" in life due to decreased mobility or health issues. Meeting those little needs can have a large impact on the overall quality of life. Connections and Community presents an app with a push function that notifies volunteer members of care needs from local members of the senior population. Volunteers sign up to provide services through the app and confirm registration via email link. After a brief background check, the volunteers enter the app community and can bid on "gigs" in their area as they are posted. Bid awards may be determined by the preferences the senior sets, either by the fastest time, best reputation, or prior acquaintance with the volunteer. Once the need is met, the volunteer rates the senior and the senior rates the volunteer to support a quality rating system across the community.

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
Westinghouse **Joseph Bistransky** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPA* **Margaret Potter** *Duquesne University* *School of Law, JD* **Aaron Simms** *University of Pittsburgh* *GSPIA, MPA*	**Student Checkup: Filling the Senior Support Gap** This solution uses a mobile application or database connected to DHS's existing website to connect seniors who need short-term, temporary care and advice to local healthcare field students who need volunteer hours as part of their curricula. For the seniors, this offers a no-cost intermediate step between caregivers and medical professionals, while for the students, it offers an opportunity to fulfill requirements much more flexibly than is possible with a traditional internship, and build connections with the local community, keeping healthcare professionals in the Allegheny County area.

APPENDIX B: CASE COMPETITION JUDGES AND PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES

Judges

Dave Coplan, *Executive Director, Human Services Center Corporation*

Erin Dalton, *Deputy Director, Analytics, Technology, Planning,*
   Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Laura Dragowski, *Critical Community Initiatives, City of Pittsburgh*

Lauri Fink, *Senior Program Officer, Hillman Foundation*

Tony Gorczeny, *Professor, Chatham University*

Kathryn Hefferen, *Program Manager, UPMC Enterprises*

Scott Izzo, *Senior Advisor, Richard King Mellon Foundation*

Ian Mavero, *Chief Technology Officer, Allegheny County Department of Human Services*

Laura Meixell, *Enterprise Data Architect, Allegheny County Department of Human Services*

Bhavini Patel, *Co-Founder, Beamdata*

Tracy Soska, *Retired, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work*

Nagen Suriya, *Managing Director, Deloitte*

Pat Valentine, *Executive Deputy Director for Integrated Program Services,*
   Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Shimira Williams, *Co-Founder, C.C. Busy*

University Participants

Carlow University (1)
   School of Psychology

Chatham University (4)
   School of Psychology
   School of Sustainability

Carnegie Mellon University (28)
   School of Arts
   Heinz College
   School of Engineering

Duquesne University (5)
   School of Law

Edinboro University (1)
   School of Social Work

University of Pittsburgh (28 students)
   School of Social Work
   Graduate School of Public Health
   Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
   School of Medicine

Robert Morris University (1)
   School of Business