

DHS
MAKING
AN
IMPACT



Director's Action Line

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services works diligently to provide exemplary services to Allegheny County residents; however, despite our best efforts, sometimes the people we serve and other interested parties have concerns or even complaints about aspects of our service delivery. In order to address the need for a responsive conduit to hear and quickly troubleshoot any of these issues that could hinder effective service delivery, the Director's Action Line (DAL) was implemented in the fall of 1996. At the time, the DAL was limited to responding to individuals who had questions, concerns or complaints about any child welfare services. However, with the creation of an integrated Department of Human Services and as a testament to the success of a customer service "action line," the DAL's purview expanded to encompass calls regarding any issues client/consumers, professionals or residents had with DHS and its service array.

DAL Specialists offer referrals, support, information and clarification, as well as help to resolve financial concerns with DHS-related payments. DAL Specialists also have the ability to initiate case reviews, and they work collaboratively with DHS management staff, including senior staff, to promptly resolve concerns or complaints. DAL specialists are careful and active listeners who want to help. They take the time to talk with those we serve and with whom we work to find out all of the pertinent information, uncover any misunderstandings and service-disconnects and take necessary action.

Every year, the DAL receives thousands of contacts from the public. These calls, emails and face-to face meetings include concerns, requests for information, referrals to resources and clarification of policies and practices. Although this number of contacts shows the magnitude of the DAL's work, the actual consumers are the ones who can testify to the positive impact the DAL has on individuals and families as well as the larger human services system. The DAL has enhanced our Department's ability to be truly accessible, establishing, via a well-publicized 800-line, an opportunity for an individual to have a meaningful dialog about issues that matter to them. It's one of the first reforms I made during my tenure and among my proudest accomplishments.

Marc Cherna
Director, Allegheny County Department of Human Services



Dan Onorato
Allegheny County Executive

Anna is a foster parent and owns a daycare center. She originally learned of the DAL from a packet she received for foster parents. At the time of her call, she had seven children living with her and a judge ordered that two of her foster children attend summer camp. It was said that the DHS Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) would cover the costs of the camp.

However, after three weeks of the children attending the camp, there were issues with the camp funding and the children could no longer attend. Anna then began to receive bills for the time that the children attended the camp.

"I called my caseworker right away," said Anna. "My caseworker and I had a good relationship. She talked with her supervisor and they both worked diligently to try and resolve my problem, but no solid resolution was found. I kept receiving the bills."

After working with her caseworker on the issue for almost a year, Anna decided she would call the DAL for help to stop the billing.

"The DAL Specialist was polite and called me plenty of times to clarify information I had given to her," said Anna. "She wanted to make sure there weren't any holes in her information. She also called to give me updates so that I wasn't left wondering. It was very considerate of her. You could tell she genuinely wanted to help."

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Within a week, the DAL Specialist called Anna one more time and let her know that she didn't have to worry about the camp bill any longer. It was going to get paid.

“It was a really positive experience,” said Anna. “I’d recommend contacting DAL to anyone who has questions or concerns because they are quick to respond, courteous and honestly care about helping you with your situation.”

Cathleen proudly calls herself a children's advocate. She's fostered more than 50 children in her life, 12 of whom were fostered through CYF. When she found out her three grandchildren were abandoned and put into foster care through CYF, she knew immediately that she wanted to be named the legal custodian of the children.

“These children were my babies and they had been abandoned,” she said. “They needed to be home with their family.”

She swiftly contacted CYF to begin the process and, like many processes involving the safety and health of children, transferring custodianship can be a complicated process. These processes are challenging in order to help ensure the welfare of children in the system.

“I had all of the clearances I needed and everything was up to code on my end,” Cathleen said. “A judge also agreed that the children should be placed in my care, so it seemed like it wouldn't be difficult.”

However, despite her spotless record and long history as a foster parent, she was having trouble getting the transfer of guardianship completed. She also struggled with keeping track of what information she needed to send, to where she needed to send the information, and how she should handle the many different CYF caseworkers and supervisors she worked with. To help alleviate her stress and get the process on track, she contacted the DAL.

“The Director's Action Line moved so quickly,” she said. “My issues were taken care of very promptly.”



Within a few business days, Cathleen saw progress in her process of gaining legal custodianship of her grandchildren.

“I couldn't have asked for a better trained, more knowledgeable team to guide me through the process,” said Cathleen. “I worked with a lot of caseworkers and different CYF employees and the DAL Specialist helped keep everything on track.”

Having the DAL is a very helpful resource. By working in conjunction with the DHS offices and providers, County offices and other stakeholders, the DAL is able to quickly resolve issues, find answers to pertinent questions and function as an overall advocate for the DHS consumer.

“DAL is absolutely an important part of the Department,” said Cathleen. “I'm all in favor of the DAL and the work that it does.”