## Grant supporting diligent recruitment initiative comes to an end, but work continues

September 30 marked the end of a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to reduce youth congregate care. This funding was first received in 2013.

Since receiving the grant, DHS has conducted trainings for foster care providers, implemented the Youth Speakers Bureau to give youth in foster care a platform for sharing their experiences and making suggestions, and supported prospective and current foster families by creating a peer support network of former foster parents. The grant has also allowed providers to develop and retain a stronger network of foster care families.

The overall results of the diligent recruitment initiative have been positive: DHS has expanded the number of resource family homes for teens by nearly 120% and reduced the use of congregate care from 44% of teens to 24%. There have also been improvements in training and communication among providers, DHS, and resource families. A recent survey of foster families indicated that they feel more supported than before the diligent recruitment activities.

"I am proud of the focus that we brought to the need for foster care families for teens. The collaboration among DHS diligent recruitment team as well as between our providers has been unprecedented and so valuable during this initiative. I'm also excited about the work we are doing with the youth in congregate care settings to develop their strategic sharing and public speaking skills to advocate for themselves and prepare them for family living," said Heather Blair, contract monitor supervisor for CYF and project director the last year and a half of the grant.

Although the grant has ended, work on this initiative is ongoing. DHS will continue to recruit foster families for teens and work closely with providers to build capacity.

For more information on these initiatives, contact Heather at Heather.Blair@AlleghenyCounty.US.