



DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services



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DHS offices, Family Court collaborate to educate youth

Several DHS offices have been working with Family Court's Older Youth Work Group to find innovative ways to educate youth about opportunities available to them during placement.

Since 2017, the Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning (ATP) has conducted an annual survey of youth in child welfare out-of-home placements (congregate care, foster care, kinship care and independent living) to learn youths' perspectives on being able to participate in developmentally appropriate activities. While surveys show that youth in out-of-home placements generally feel they can participate in "normal" youth activities such as getting a driver's license, using the makeup and jewelry they want to use, or attending a movie or social outing with friends, youth in congregate care are less able to participate in these activities than those in family-based settings.

To reach youth in congregate care, the Older Youth Work Group worked with DHS's Office of Community Relations (OCR) and Youth Support Partners (YSP) unit to create a visually engaging poster that outlines youth's rights when it comes to accessing activities. By answering a series of yes or no questions, teens move through the poster to determine whether they simply need to ask permission for an activity or if the activity will require additional planning. Posters will be displayed in group homes, YSP offices and Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) offices.

The information in the poster will be further explored during a series of Know Your Rights Jeopardy sessions. Using the popular game show's format, YSPs and other members of the Older Youth Work Group will be visiting congregate care homes to provide more in-depth information on rights to the youth in care.

"Youth who are in congregate care are already living outside of the 'normal' family life that their peers may be experiencing," said Judge Jennifer McCrady, Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. "By educating these youth on their rights and helping them to participate in the activities that are important to them, we hope that we are able to give them not only a sense of normalcy, but also the tools they need to develop their sense of self and find their place in the world."