



DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services



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Five questions with Susan Bertonaschi

Susan is early childhood senior advisor in the Office of Community Services (OCS). You can reach her at susan.bertonaschi@alleghenycounty.us.

1. What was your path to Allegheny County/DHS?

While at Pitt earning a master's degree in child development, I also worked at the Alliance for Infants & Toddlers (a DHS service provider), which was my first experience partnering with DHS. Life then took me to Atlanta, GA for 19 years where I worked in Georgia's state government (public health), philanthropy (various private foundations), and for United Way of Greater Atlanta. All my work in Georgia was focused on the integration of early childhood development and child health to enhance outcomes for young children and their families. Upon moving back home to Pittsburgh in 2019, I was fortunate to be hired by DHS for the Hello Baby launch. This is a great role and I am enjoying every day here. Thanks, DHS for taking a chance on me!

2. Tell us a bit about the work you do.

I manage the Hello Baby program, a new initiative launched in September 2020. Having a baby is exciting but can be stressful. Hello Baby is here to help every family in Allegheny County feel supported and connected as they adjust to life with a new baby. Using a tiered approach, Hello Baby offers differentiated support based on the needs of each family. We've developed a website that is accessible to all families and full of information on local resources and parenting topics. DHS is using a specially designed algorithm to identify families who are at risk of home removal by the child's third birthday so we can provide intensive support to those families who need it most. We partner with Healthy Start Pittsburgh, the Family Center network, Allegheny County Health Department, United Way of Southwestern PA, and the birthing hospitals in the county to implement Hello Baby. It's an amazing partnership!

3. How does your work help to support DHS's mission and goals?

Hello Baby is a family strengthening model in the Office of Community Services, designed to enhance the well-being of families throughout Allegheny County. The goal is to support families with newborns and reach them early to prevent child abuse and neglect from ever happening.

4. What most excites you about your work?

Hello Baby is groundbreaking! It's a unique approach to reaching the county's most vulnerable families early in a child's life with supports, when healthy development is critical. My DHS colleagues on the Hello Baby team (OCS, OCR, ATP, CYF, OBH) and our community partners show up every day with commitment, passion, experience, and innovation to improve the well-being of our youngest County residents. The Hello Baby team is the most cohesive and mission-driven group in which I have ever participated.

5. What is most important thing DHS staff should know about your role?

Check out <https://www.hellobabypgh.org/> for information on available resources and parent topics for your participants/clients, or for yourself. Our partners at United Way 2-1-1 are ready to answer calls and provide resources to families with children under the age of five through a family specialist dedicated to Hello Baby. And our 27 Family Centers are available to support any family throughout the County, and now have a specific focus on families with newborns. Feel free to reach out to me with questions or if you need additional resources.