



DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services



April 2021

Youth and staff collaborate to address racial equity

A group of transition age youth (TAY) and staff from DHS and the 412 Youth Zone have spent the last few months working together to normalize conversations around race and create supportive connections during an especially challenging time.

The conversations began last June when several staff members from across TAY services in the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) and the Office of Community Services (OCS) started holding virtual check-ins to see how people were coping with all of the trauma around events happening in the news. These discussions led to the creation of a core team that is using a two-pronged approach to support staff and achieve equitable outcomes for youth.

To encourage conversation and offer opportunities for staff healing, DHS has contracted with YogaRoots On Location to offer a series of quarterly sessions. During the sessions, the 100 program participants gather to watch educational videos, have one-on-one discussions and debrief as a group on topics related to race. These sessions will run through the end of 2021.

To create better outcomes for youth, the core team conducted targeted strategic planning to learn the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care. Using the already established CYF transition plan as a framework, the core team voted to start with the domain of Housing.

The Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning (ATP) generated an analysis of homelessness outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care for the core team to review. The analysis showed that black youth nearly always have had substantially higher rates of DHS housing/homelessness services or homeless episodes (as defined by HUD).

Armed with this information, the core team set up a virtual brainstorm session where staff and youth from SITY (Systems Improvement Through Youth) conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats) analysis. The information gathered through the brainstorm was then brought back to the core team who did additional analysis based on the insights that were shared. The recommendations generated will be reviewed by brainstorm participants, CYF and OCS leadership, and TAY staff. Once approved, the core team will create an action plan to implement the recommendations.

While the team is currently focused on housing, plans are in place to cover all of the transition plan domains, which are education; financial; employment; documents; transportation; physical/emotional health; legal; parenting; and community, cultural and social life.

To learn more about this work, contact Nneka Hawthorne at Nneka.Hawthorne@AlleghenyCounty.US.