

ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
*Realizing a Community Vision*  
A Decade of Progress  
1997-2007

**Contributors and Their Comments**

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**Civic Leaders**

It is a real pleasure to review the ten-year history of the Department of Human Services. It has been ten years of remarkable accomplishment. I have had the privilege of being involved with the Department from both a policy and implementation perspective.

In regard to the policy perspective, I served as a member of the COMPAC 21 committee chaired by John Murray that reduced the number of departments reporting to the Commissioners to six—one of which was the Department of Human Services. I also sat on the Human Services Advisory

Committee that Dr. Murray chaired that helped Marc Cherna devise and implement strategy to overcome the silos created by funding sources and bureaucratic parochialism in order to serve the community needs effectively.

Operationally, I was a member of a number of Boards who received funding from DHS. I am presently a member of NAM/Southwest PA Board that has substantial contracts from DHS.

From all of these perspectives, in my opinion DHS has been exceptionally successful in developing integrated services that are responsive to community, especially in low-income and minority neighborhoods. Specifically, DHS developed a series of five strategies to achieve their ability to meet the complex needs of the consumer population.

#### Strategy 1: Holistic Approach

Recognizing that people need comprehensive services, that department was able to coordinate protective services, mental health, transportation, and recreation services in an effective way to meet the needs of aging. This is one example of many in the drive for comprehensive services.

#### Strategy 2: Collaboration

The department has unprecedented relations with private business, foundations, and the university community. As a former chair of The Pittsburgh Housing Authority, I know that DHS worked closely with the Housing Authority staff to provide residents with needed services.

#### Strategy 3: Pro-active Planning

DHS has a deep commitment to prevention.

#### Strategy 4: Enhanced Communication

Organization is open to the press/consumers (through town meetings, director's action lines, etc.) DHS also produces a number of readable and high quality presentations.

In summary, under Marc Cherna's leadership, DHS has become a national leader in innovation of high quality human services.

**Morton Coleman, PhD**

**Professor Emeritus**

**University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work**

Initially, we brought Marc Cherna to Allegheny County to fix a host of very serious, and very public problems at Children and Youth Services. Marc brought a new style of common sense or "horse sense" management to a bureaucracy that had epitomized the term "red tape" and inefficiency. Immediately he began to take on the toughest problems while at the same time dealing with entrenched systems, overburdened procedures, uncooperative unions, and a critical, sometimes hostile newspaper. Through it all Marc had the courage, tenacity, and perseverance to create a better system, - one which focused upon "serving" families, and not itself.

In 1996, these attributes are what led Mike Dawida and myself to assign Marc an even greater challenge, - one that would test his talents to the limit. The creation of the Department of Human Services pulled together a myriad of programs, some which were distinct, and some that were related. This is best described as being like a room full of musicians, all with different instruments, trying to play the same song, but on their own with no direction. But with much thought, effort, and planning this group slowly began to play together on time and in the right key. Marc was the conductor that turned that uncoordinated group of musicians into a world-class

symphony, the standard for others to imitate and emulate! In the end those who watched, participated, or were served, now stand in ovation as this host of talent performs at the direction of a true master. Marc deserves this recognition, and I offer him my gratitude and thanks for doing a job that only he could accomplish..... (I must also add, with a little help from Guy Tumolo!)

Congratulations!

**Bob Cranmer**

**Former Allegheny County Commissioner**

Changing externalities have caused the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to reengineer and transform itself several times during the past decade. The Department was able to do so with class and alacrity because of its inherent culture of responsiveness. The Department is sensitive to its consumer's needs and the needs of the community in which it operates. It keeps its finger on the pulse of the community, and it is willing to undertake calculated risks to answer its clients' needs as effectively as possible.

**Linda Dickerson**

**Principal, Dickerson & Mangus, Ink.**

I am very pleased to offer my perspective on the incredible successes that have been achieved by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services during the last decade. Allegheny County Department of Human Services, under the direction of Marc Cherna, has created innovative programming and strengthened the safety net for the most vulnerable citizens of our region. Children's mental health programs and the children's education and social service inner sections have been strengthened dramatically. More children are now served in their homes and remain in community settings. Children who need special care at home, in school, and in the community are able to access those resources.

The success of the HealthChoices program in Allegheny County's unique public-private partnership with Community Care Behavioral Health has become a model program nationwide. Services for severe and persistently mentally ill individuals as well as those with addiction disorders are significantly better off than they were prior to the onset of the program. The mental health court, the long-term residential services, the community treatment teams, the expansion of case management and many of the other innovative programs that have been developed for these populations are providing exceptional services with exceptional results.

Pittsburgh can be very proud of the leadership in Allegheny County and the successes they have been able to demonstrate

**Diane Holder**

**President**

**UPMC Health Plan and UPMC Insurance Services Division**

Under the skilled leadership of Director Marc Cherna, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has come to be recognized as a national model for child welfare, mental health and aging. DHS has twice been honored by Harvard University and the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance for its innovative programming in behavioral health and adoption services. Earlier this year, the Department demonstrated its ongoing commitment to connecting consumers with the most up-to-date information on services, programs and providers through HumanServices.net. This revolutionary Internet-based tool is useful to both human service professionals and families seeking assistance. I am continually impressed by the Department's

ability to adapt to the ever-changing needs of its clients and their families, and I am especially grateful to the professionals who have helped make the Allegheny County Department of Human Services an award-winning agency for the past 10 years.

**Dan Onorato,**  
**Allegheny County Chief Executive**

Congratulations on the 10th anniversary of your commitment to quality and accessible service to the families of Allegheny County.

During the past ten years, the men and women of the Department of Human Services have demonstrated a remarkable dedication to the principles of respect, empowerment, positive focus and holistic care. I salute the outstanding leadership and the high standards of professionalism established and exhibited by all and I thank you for significantly improving the quality of life for those fellow citizens in our community that are in most need. WELL DONE !

**James C. Roddey**  
**Former Chief Executive, Allegheny County**

Keep up the good work. I believe the Human Services Department is a national model for shifting from an intervention to a prevention model and the sustained effort in that regard over the past decade, to continue and heighten the momentum initiated by Former President Commissioner Tom Forester and then Director Bob Nelkin, is inspiring. That it has continued despite changes in both the County Executive and the ruling political party is a testament to good government.

**Frederick W. Thieman, Esquire**  
**Thieman & Ward**

What Pittsburgh demonstrated [in the post-Katrina response] that might be the envy of other communities was the ability and willingness of governmental and nongovernmental agencies alike to work together. It took one person, Edith Shapira, to set the "train" in motion, but after that the momentum was breathtaking and heartwarming. People here know each other's capacities, something which enabled officials at Goodwill Industries and in the DHS to quickly draw up plans assigning specific duties to particular agencies. Pittsburgh's agencies fell in line behind Marc Cherna, head of DHS. . . It was this spirit and the administrative planning that, in the words of one participant, "showed Pittsburgh at its best."

**Clarke Thomas**  
**Senior Editor, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**  
*in Hurricane Katrina: A Community's Response to a National Disaster*  
University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics

## **Human Services Professionals**

I want to salute you for holding the DHS community feedback meetings. You have always been seen to hear the good, bad, and ugly, and you are to be complimented for your openness.

The development of the Disability Connections Office has been an excellent response to keeping disability issues front and center with county, and the new Aging and Disability Resource Center is also doing an excellent job.

Given the fiscal reporting changes, there is a need for more technical assistance to providers. DHS needs to work to increase rates to be consistent with the providers' costs. Overall, DHS needs to continue to shift from a diagnostic format to a functional needs format and thus lessen the gaps between diagnostic silos.

**Al Condeluci**  
**Executive Director**  
**United Cerebral Palsy**

It is indeed a pleasure to offer comments to Allegheny County [Department of Human Services] on its current 10-year anniversary. As the Executive Director of the American Public Human Service Association, a nonprofit, bipartisan organization of state and local human service agencies and individuals who work in or are interested in public human service programs, I have had the distinct honor to work with you and your colleagues throughout the nation on issues critical to public human services. Needless to say, Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS), a local agency member of APHSA, stands out as a leader in the field and an organization that is looked to by others when innovation in practice and service delivery is the issue at hand.

Of particular note is Allegheny County DHS's extensive efforts to provide an array of in-home services to children and families that have been designed to prevent out-of-home placement of children. In Allegheny County, 27 or 31 programs are financially supported by the local agency. With strong leadership, Allegheny County DHS has been able to engage the community in recognizing that prevention services are the key to a healthy child, a healthy family, and a healthy community.

Allegheny County DHS's strategy of maximizing funding streams while not allowing those funding streams to dictate practice, has proved to be enormously successful. The integrated services approach that Allegheny County DHS has used, both in services to children as well as for other services to people in need, is the hallmark of a modern public human services agency and one that can be modeled throughout the country.

I had the distinct honor of attending the ceremony last summer when the Allegheny County Department of Human Services received the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government for its unique approach to working with people who have behavioral health diagnoses as they are released from Pennsylvania penitentiaries. This award is a testimony to the quality of excellence of DHS's forensic programs that are collaborative, community-oriented, and that produce high return on the investment for the individuals involved and Allegheny County as a whole.

The Allegheny County DHS is an innovative and forward-thinking agency that has clearly established guiding principles and consistently and creatively uses them to develop a wide array of highly effective services for its citizens.

We at APHSA want to offer our congratulations and best wishes on the tenth anniversary of DHS and we would be proud if you would include them in the anniversary publication being development. We send our very best and we look forward to our continuing relationship with DHS.

**Jerry W. Friedman**  
**Executive Director**  
**American Public Human Services Association**

Allegheny County once was a pathetic national disgrace. Today, it is a shining national model. Allegheny County is showing the nation that child welfare systems can be fixed, and it is showing the nation how to fix them. Most parts of the country have felt that the answer to all child welfare problems can be boiled down to "take the child and run." They do not take chances in Allegheny County. What they do is they remove the risk instead of the child.

**Richard Wexler**

**Executive Director**

**National Coalition for Child Protection Reform**

*(on CNN Newsnight with Aaron Brown, aired August 14, 2002)*

## **Foundations**

Over the past ten years, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services has advanced dramatically its ability to meet the growing needs of its residents. It has done so not in a vacuum, but with significant input from and well-deserved investment by the community.

Undaunted by the constantly shifting political and policy landscapes, Department Director Marc Cherna has secured and won broad community input and investment. He has made the most of opportunities to maximize scarce community resources and remedy fragmented systems and services. His strength as a leader is reflected in the staff he has hired: their commitment to excellence has made the Department's transformation a nationally recognized success.

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation is honored to have been able to support the Department in its efforts to integrate its services, evaluate its progress, and improve the manner in which it develops and executes its programs.

Since 1997, DHS has been awarded about a half a million in grants from the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, starting with a contribution to the Human Services Integration Fund. The Fund supported a comprehensive evaluation of the services and systems involved with the integration of five departments into a single comprehensive delivery model, allowing the County to do the quality planning that solely public budgets rarely allow. The Foundation expected this initial investment to seed, among other improvements, growth in behavioral health programming capacity, child welfare system repairs and new methods of developing, providing and evaluating services for seniors.

### **Behavioral Health**

In 1998 the Foundation supported the County's establishment of a Masters Program at the Allegheny County Juvenile Court, which dramatically expanded and rationalized the judicial resources devoted to children by appointing attorneys experienced in child welfare to review routine cases and coordinate efforts between the Courts and Children and Youth Services. It also supported another bold judicial enhancement.

In 2001, the County developed the Mental Health Court, established as the first in the state in 2001, to ensure that non-violent and misdemeanor cases within the County's jurisdiction receive alternative adjudication and specialized community mental health services. This Court has contributed to the decriminalization of mental illness, better treatment of residents with mental illness who commit non-violent or misdemeanor offenses and lower recidivism rates. Today the Allegheny County Mental Health Court is one of ten national finalists to be considered as a Mental Health Court Learning Site for new mental health courts across the country.

### Child Welfare System Repairs

Also in 1998, in an attempt to reduce child abuse and neglect in the County through a comprehensive approach of screening, assessment, home visitation and innovative mentoring support, the County and Healthy Start, Inc., designed a new model to improve the identification and treatment of mothers and pregnant women with substance abuse issues. The "Sisters Project" used peer counselors to engage, motivate and bring women in for treatment, ultimately improving child well-being, drug and alcohol treatment of mothers, and maternal stability (housing, employment) after treatment.

In 1999, the County sought and won support from the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and other foundations to create a new governance structure, the Children's Cabinet, to bring together the major public and private stakeholders that are involved in supporting children's mental health and general well-being. It established a meaningful interagency collaboration at levels to improve the care and services provided to children.

### Services for Seniors

In response to the low participation of seniors in the Medicare Buy-In program in 1998, the Foundation provided funding to the Area Agency on Aging and Department of Public Welfare to develop and implement a new training module for social service workers and an outreach campaign. The initiative succeeded in educating individuals experienced in working with seniors, caregivers and seniors themselves about the program and helping seniors enroll in the program.

In 2005, after changes to the Medicare program, the County began a Medicare Centralized Information and Coordination Project to ensure continuity of care for individuals on the Part D Prescription Drug Plan. The federal Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003 is extremely complicated legislation that could disrupt medication regimens for elderly and/or disabled low-income individuals in the County. The County, working closely with community organizations that serve the populations at stake, established the centralization project to ensure that Allegheny County residents who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid will be able to continue their medication regimens during the implementation of Part D.

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation applauds the Department's persistence and commitment, and looks forward to all that the Department will accomplish in the future.

**Karen Wolk Feinstein, PhD**

**President**

**Jewish Healthcare Foundation**

The DHS commitment to collaboration has spanned the age continuum. The Beverly Jewel Wall Lovelace Fund for Children's Programs grew out of an amazing partnership built on the shared vision of DHS, The Pittsburgh Foundation, the city and county housing authorities and the communities themselves to engage parents in developing, running, and governing after school and summer programs to keep their children safe in their public housing communities. Now in its eleventh year, the program serves nearly 1,000 children and employs more than 125 local residents in 19 public housing communities. What's more, this initiative served as a model for a new collaboration to promote wellness, socialization, community building, and empowerment among residents of public housing senior high-rise buildings. The Senior Living Enhancement Program, serving more than 1,000 seniors in 12 sites, is--like its prototype--a partnership of DHS, Allegheny County Housing Authority, Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh and The

Pittsburgh Foundation. Neither would have been possible without DHS support, funding, and leadership.

**Gerri Kay**  
**Vice President for Program and Policy**  
**The Pittsburgh Foundation**

The success story of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services is not just that a bureaucratic reorganization took place. Although it was important to connect previously independent – but overlapping – offices and departments, it was more important to change how those offices and department delivered services. A change in name only would be no change at all.

In a little over ten years, I've observed a true cultural change that has taken place under the leadership of the director, Marc Cherna. The department is to be commended for undergoing a true transformation by maintaining a commitment to community while emphasizing quality, placing a priority on prevention, and building on existing strengths while showing a genuine interest in innovation. All this during a period when the problems facing the American family have become more complex, growing in severity and magnitude; the proposed solutions have grown more specialized; and the communities' resources for helping families barely able to respond to the demand for service. In Allegheny County, professional leadership was in a mode of innovation and expansion, not "retrenchment."

One key to this success, in my opinion, has been the creative partnership of the department with Pittsburgh's foundation community. Together, we explored ways in which foundations with their flexible resources and different experiences could join creatively with the public sector to address the key policy challenges of our day through new ideas and the more effective use of government and foundation resources.

The increasing numbers of children born and raised in poverty, the education crisis, the exploding crime rate and attendant strain on the criminal justice system – all call for a reweaving of our social safety net. Gone are the days when foundations can create major model social programs outside government and expect them to be replicated and funded by the state or local government. State and local governments are also faced with a new set of conditions. As federal funding for social programs has been reduced or redirected, state governments have been forced to examine their social agenda and, in many cases, cut social programs. Facing these challenges, there has been a willingness on the part of the department and foundations to explore new options and new partnerships. In fact, under Marc Cherna's leadership this partnership has been a national model.

The Heinz Endowments has been proud to partner with the department in the development of Allegheny County's Family Support System. The family support centers, which provide family-strengthening services in a community setting, have always been a welcoming place for families with small children. For more than ten years, together we have incubated new models, with the Heinz Endowments first funding a demonstration program that became the prototype for the county. There are now 32 family support centers in Allegheny County that have emerged; the Department has taken steps to finance the system, ensuring that it is sustainable and of high quality. The Heinz Endowments has partnered with the Department to fund the technical assistance and professional development for the system. Family centers have emerged not just as model programs, but also as the product of a model process – the public and private sector together identifying the need to restructure large, inefficient systems in the public sector.



Another innovative approach taken by the Department to improve its delivery of services is the Human Services Integration Fund (HSIF). Working with Pittsburgh's strong philanthropic community, the Department created the HSIF so that foundations could pool contributions in support of critical projects that cannot be funded through otherwise restricted government funds. The HSIF, which is supported by a broad representation of the community's foundations including The Heinz Endowments, has backed the development of the information technology infrastructure that has improved the county's ability to use data to inform decision-making. Excitingly, this system is the foundation for the development of an important community resource, the Information Commons.

The challenge for the Department moving forward is to maintain this emphasis on quality and to keep the spirit of innovation alive. These new partnerships attempt to foster real reform – to make strategic changes to use state resources more effectively. In Allegheny County, the model has shown that together we can reinforce risk-taking in one another while we thoughtfully apply the best lessons of past experiences to the next set of challenges.

**Margaret Petruska**  
**Senior Program Director, Children, Youth & Families**  
**The Heinz Endowments**

### **Community Organizations/Providers**

The Urban League of Pittsburgh (ULP), which represents the interests of thousands of African-Americans in Southwestern Pennsylvania, would like to submit the following comments regarding our experience with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and the work that your agency performs.

DHS currently contributes funding for nine ULP programs that provide over 7,000 clients with employment, family support, youth development, food, and direct housing services. We believe that DHS should be commended for their innovative work, bold leadership, and community responsiveness.

Under the leadership of Marc Cherna and the Office of Community Services staff, family support services in Allegheny County have received immeasurable support. DHS invests approximately 6 million dollars annually to fund family support centers with the belief that prevention services like the kind offered through family support centers help save the lives of children and empower families. As a result, Allegheny County is seen as a model family support service delivery system and is leaps and bounds ahead of other regions in helping to protect and nurture children and strengthen families.

Last year, Allegheny County DHS was recognized nationally for its work in having no child die in Allegheny County from abuse or neglect. Additionally, through the county's work with foster families and kinship care and family decision-making strategies that help keep families intact and involved in decisions that impact their future, the county, again, has demonstrated its leadership and excellence in providing quality human services.

DHS has spearheaded the development of two types of System of Care Initiatives, whose goal is to build seamless, integrated systems of care for children and families in Allegheny County. The most current system of care addresses early childhood systems of care and the mental health needs of children birth to age six. DHS recently facilitated six planning meetings that lay down the

groundwork for how these early childhood systems can work together to support this population. DHS took great care in making certain that there was broad representation of not only early childhood service providers, but, was conscientious in making certain that parents of children with mental health and other special needs were represented with opportunities for equal input.

There have been other examples of how the county has been responsive to the needs of county residents. The county initiated the Birth to Five Initiative that helps parents, caregivers and educators improve their ability to enhance the early literacy and learning of young children in several neighborhoods including Duquesne, PA, through collaborations, technical assistance and other enhancements. Addressing the needs of children who witness violence through the Safe Start program is another county program that is much needed and is making a difference in the lives of families.

In addition, DHS has been very supportive of our efforts in housing assistance. The ULP CYF Housing Counseling/Location Program was created at the request of DHS in June of 1997 to provide housing counseling and cash assistance in the form of subsidies, usually for the first month's rent and security deposit, to prevent placement of children in foster care or to facilitate reunification for those in placement. The program started out in December 1997 with a 6 ½ month budget of \$54,292 with one staff person and has expanded to a FY 05-06 total budget of \$456,023.00 with eight staff persons. A two-year evaluation by the DHS Office of Information Management (OIM) showed a 90 percent success rate in preventing foster placement within six months after the subsidy was issued as well as significant progress in family reunification over the same period.

Even more impressive was OIM's cost benefit analysis of the program. Based on average subsidy amounts (\$685) and the average cost per day of foster care (\$50), evaluators reported that in prevention cases—those cases where placement was avoided—the program saved \$12 for every \$1 spent (a total of nearly \$2 million) for the 251 families with no children in placement at the time of referral. For the 138 families who had had children in placement and were subsequently reunified, the savings were more than \$335,000—or a return of \$4.57 for every dollar spent. It is these kinds of results that have attracted national attention to the services provided by Allegheny County DHS and have been described as a "model" for child welfare services by both CNN and ABC News.

Moreover, our staff has benefited greatly from the supportive services and workshops offered. Staff mentioned specifically the classes at Community College of Allegheny County and the recent racial sensitivity and diversity training as being very helpful and needed. DHS has always had an open ear to our issues and has been willing to take steps to resolve glitches in the system in the past. We are grateful that they have given the ULP the opportunity to serve the community. DHS has fostered a respect for our staff and integrated them into the DHS system even though we are a contracted agency. Staff have also mentioned the effectiveness of the Director's Action line that has been a valuable resource to our counselors and to their clients. DHS has made the job of our CYF Housing Counseling/Location Program staff easier by allowing us access to their intranet system.

Finally, the county took the lead in organizing a county response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster and the needs of evacuees arriving in the area from the Gulf Coast. The county was able to marshal its departments, service providers, government, businesses, foundations, and individuals into a massive, effective response team that was, in our estimation, unequaled across the nation. Katrina evacuees that we have worked with have expressed their sincere gratitude for the

compassion, efficiency and warm response that they received from the community. If the county had not taken the lead in this area, we really feel the response would not have been so successful.

We are proud of and agree with the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics' "Case in Point" publication, *Hurricane Katrina: A Community's Response to a National Disaster* by Clarke Thomas. We were so impressed with the document that we sent a copy to more than 100 Urban League affiliates across the country and the National Urban League.

**Esther L. Bush**  
**President and CEO**  
**Urban League of Pittsburgh, Inc.**

My name is Ellen Filar and I coordinate the Art Therapy Program at Allegheny East MH/MR Center, Inc and the EveryOne An Artist Gallery, which exhibits the work of artists with disabilities. I want to congratulate you on a decade of quality service to individuals in Allegheny County. We are most familiar with your services because of the annual Flowering of Insight art exhibit.

The individuals I work with have participated in the exhibit since 2002 and it is an event they truly look forward to each year. We enjoy the different themes each year and the challenge of creating artwork that responds to the theme. They have such a sense of pride and importance knowing their artwork is on display. I sincerely hope this event continues and grows each year.

**Ellen Filar, ATR**  
**Coordinator, Art Therapy Program**  
**and EveryOne An Artist Gallery**  
**Allegheny East MH/MR Center, Inc.**

*"Imagining something may be the first step in making it happen, but it takes the real time and real efforts of real people to turn thoughts into deeds or visions into inventions."*

As these words suggest, Fred Rogers believed in dreaming, but he also knew that dreams aren't realized without a great deal of work and collaboration. Over the last decade, the Department of Human Services has done both. It has envisioned—in its comprehensive "redesign"—a more accessible, more holistic approach to serving vulnerable families, and—with broad community support—it has created programs that are recognized as national models.

Family Communications, Inc., which is dedicated to the healthy development of children, appreciates, in particular, the Department's success in keeping children safe and, increasingly, with their own families. Through collaboration and creative program design, emotionally troubled children are being helped in less restrictive settings, and a unique public/private partnership that includes the courts and *pro bono* attorneys has vastly improved the adoption process and brought permanency to hundreds of children.

You understand, as Fred did, that "wishes don't make things come true," but your hard work is realizing dreams for all of us. We applaud your efforts on behalf of children, their families, and others who care for them, with confidence that the next decade will be at least as productive as the last one has been. You are making the Allegheny County "neighborhood" more beautiful every day.

**William H. Isler**  
**President**  
**Family Communications, Inc.**

Thank you for the opportunity for me to comment on the services of DHS. You are blessed with a serious and well-intentioned staff who work hard to deliver the services associated with the DHS strategies. The staff makes a gallant effort to stay focused on the strategies despite the many outside demands and distractions. Staff is open, flexible, and eager to help or assist. They make efforts to stay ahead of the curve in the developing issues in the community. I know from your staff that you (Marc) provide a very positive role model for a strong, committed work ethic. As you plan for the future, I suggest that you find ways to showcase the good work that you and your staff are doing. That could be done by a series of seminars sponsored by DHS on the "state of the county" on a given issue and highlight the ways DHS is addressing the issue. These could be in the form of a town meeting. It would give you, the Chief, and the staff [a chance] to be on stage telling the DHS story. Just a suggestion. Know that I value what you and your staff do for children and families.

**Dr. Joseph Lagana**

**Founder**

**Homeless Children's Education Fund**

During the past ten years the relationship of the Center for Family Excellence and ACDHS has largely been through the OCYFS. We have worked with Mr. Cherna and Dr. Marcia Sturdivant to implement several of the innovations which DHS has brought to the County. Mr. Cherna has wisely appointed capable and energetic individuals to the deputy positions. When DHS began 10 years ago they had a provisional license from the State. They are now fully licensed. Some of the programs that OCYFS has been instrumental in providing have been innovative and cutting edge.

Mr. Cherna and Dr. Sturdivant have projected a visionary view of and belief in strength based models in child welfare. Programs such as family reunification, family group meetings, male mentoring and first steps prevention programs are just a few of the innovations implemented by providers in partnership with DHS. When DHS began ten years ago they hired community liaisons from the community to connect with the leadership of DHS. These liaisons went to community meetings, sponsored community events, and engaged community leaders to make a difference. One event that came out of the community liaison appointments was the annual Celebration of Families which is held each year in Schenley Park. Families are invited to come together from all over the County. Picnic style meals are served, games are played and no one is counseled, interviewed or visited by their worker that day. Hundreds of parents, children, and provider agencies participate.

There are currently seven area offices which make it easier for families to connect with advocates and caseworkers. Along with this innovation, there is a slow move toward changing the title of caseworker to that of family advocate.

These are some of the thoughts that I have in my mind as I look back on DHS. Naturally I think that mention should be made of the work that Dr. Sturdivant has done to make these ten years such a success. The tireless effort of the Deputy and staff of OCYFS has made this child protection agency a national model which has been featured in televised specials.

**Jerome Taylor**

**Executive Director**

**Center for Family Excellence, Inc.**

A member of our family has suffered with schizophrenia since the late 1970s. I became an active advocate and educator for improved support and treatment for citizens with serious and disabling mental illness in the late 1980s.

Looking back on the past ten years, there have been several significant changes affecting the public mental health system. Organizationally, Allegheny Co. created a Department of Human Services that has enabled a broadening of individual department's focus. Additionally, when the State decided to embrace managed care for Medicaid recipients, many of us were concerned that companies that would manage the care and thus expenditures for Medicaid behavioral health would significantly reduce the money actually spent on treatment and support.

In this regard in the mid 1990s, many of us including some MH/MR Board members, formed a committee of citizens that met numerous times and ultimately made a written recommendation to the County Management. These recommendations included an oversight entity with considerable citizen involvement. Coincidentally, at this time, the Allegheny Co. management was undergoing significant changes. To the credit of the changing county management including the Department of Human Services, most of the committee recommendations were adopted. Today we have an effectively functioning citizen oversight entity for the behavioral health Medicaid managed care. Access, quality of care, and number of citizens served have increased and improved.

We are now seven years into "HealthChoices" (the name of our Medicaid managed care) and we can say it is succeeding. A remaining area for change is the integration and coordination of all health related services – aging, youth, MH, addiction services plus better connection with life's essentials such as food, clothing and shelter.

Notwithstanding these gains, much still remains to be done.

In the past five years, county DHS and the Department of Behavioral Health have looked beyond the boundaries of the Departments and of the county to find and assess alternatives to traditional ways of supporting those with mental illnesses and addiction disorders.

Safe and affordable housing has been a high priority for consumers and families for many years. During the last couple of years, Allegheny Co. has begun an aggressive new housing initiative that will create 220 plus new living arrangements. Part of the planning for this initiative is achieved by going beyond traditional behavioral health boundaries.

The county has had crisis intervention services for many years but results are not particularly good and we still have abnormally high rates of inpatient utilization. The county departments are looking at alternatives such as the Memphis, Dayton and Columbus, Ohio models as well as that in Montgomery County, PA. By broadening the consideration of various models, we trust an appropriate change for Allegheny Co. will be reached.

Finally, but maybe most importantly, Allegheny Co. Dept. of Behavioral Health Services is initiating a systemic move away from a custodial and hierarchical system of BH treatment and support to one in which consumers are more empowered and are encouraged pursue goals of recovery. An example of this support is the relatively new Peer Support and Advocacy Network (PSAN). This total transformation is an ambitious undertaking but is in keeping with newer best practices.

In overview, the new directions are progressive and not easy to achieve. We are hopeful that the energy and resolve are there to reach these and new initiatives yet to be identified.

**Richard Jevon**  
**Consumer Advocate**

Here is the short story about how DHS has helped me.

The Allegheny County Human Services has helped me and my family in a variety of ways. We receive funding to help with winter heating bills, we have been at the mercy of DHS for these services for years. Never once being turned down and always grateful we are now able to maintain our heating services. Also one very important service that we've gotten is the opportunity to use the services available for M/H and addiction recovery. My husband and I have been in recovery for almost 10 years.

We help others people access these services that we've used for so long to help themselves. Another service we became aware of through the county is the Prom Program. These services that we and others use are helpful in so many ways. The wide array of services even helped me get back to job training, computer skills, and employment. The DHS of Allegheny County changed my life. Thank you.

**Jeannette Lee**  
**Consumer**

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