



ALLEGHENY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

*Realizing a Community Vision*  
A DECADE OF PROGRESS  
1 9 9 7 - 2 0 0 7

“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.”

—Fred Rogers



**P**ittsburgh’s favorite neighbor wasn’t referring directly to the Department of Human Services in that observation, but he captured the essence of the redesign of Allegheny County’s human services system that has occurred over the last decade. When we consolidated the formerly discrete human services departments into the new “mega” Department of Human Services in 1997, we knew we were facing a momentous challenge—but what the new department should look like and how we would achieve it was much less clear. For guidance, we turned to the community.

A blue ribbon Oversight Committee and dedicated volunteers from the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, local universities, corporations, and foundations helped us formulate our vision as well as our Guiding Principles and the strategies to achieve them. If you are interested in reading our original vision document you may link to it from the DHS homepage: [www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs](http://www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs) .

The “real time and real efforts of real people” to turn that vision into reality have been remarkable. Community leaders helped formulate the original vision. Public officials embraced the concept. Legal professionals contributed *pro bono* consultation. Dedicated DHS staff helped implement the vision. Citizen volunteers took seats on advisory boards. And consumers let us know when they were well-served and not so well-served. All of these individuals contributed to what we are today.

On this our tenth anniversary, we turn again to those who have helped us “invent” this Department. Rather than attempting to measure our own progress, we invited individuals across the spectrum to comment on the changes they have seen over the last decade. Though we have added a few comments from national observers and a brief cost analysis that shows we are relying less and less on county tax dollars to support our growing range of services, this is, at heart, truly a community assessment. Many of the comments were abridged here because of space limitations, but the full text of all the responses is available on the DHS website. We invite you to read what others have said and then to join the dialogue by relaying your observations and suggestions for our future to us at One Smithfield Street, Suite 400, Pittsburgh, PA 15222 or to [DAL@dhs.county.allegheny.pa.us](mailto:DAL@dhs.county.allegheny.pa.us) .

Thank you for all you do to make Allegheny County a community that responds, with equal warmth, to the needs of neighbors like those who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina and to its own families in need, including those devastated by the flooding that resulted from Hurricane Ivan. To paraphrase one respondent, you are “Pittsburgh at its best.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Cherna".

Marc Cherna  
Director



The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has come to be recognized as a national model for child welfare, mental health, and aging services. Twice honored by Harvard University and the Ash Institute for its innovative programming in behavioral health and adoption services, the Department has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to connecting consumers with the most up-to-date information on services, programs, and providers through HumanServices.net, a revolutionary Internet-based tool that 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 ten years.

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

The Department of Human Services' survival and steady, incremental growth reflects the commitment of the public leadership. Former U. S. Attorney **Fred Thieman**, who led the County's efforts to prevent youth crime and has consulted with DHS on many occasions, makes this point effectively:

That the Department of Human Services has continued despite changes in both the County Executive and the ruling political party is inspiring and a testament to good government. It is a national model for shifting from an intervention to a prevention model.

The "redesign" of human services began in 1996 under the administration of County Commissioners **Bob Cranmer**, **Mike Dawida**, and **Larry Dunn**. Cranmer reflects that:

Marc Cherna's new style of "horse sense" management and the courage, tenacity, and perseverance to create a better system—one focused upon "serving" families, not itself—were attributes that led us to give him an even greater challenge: the creation of the "mega" Department of Human Services.



Before he became the County's Chief Executive, **Jim Roddey** worked closely with DHS as a member of its Oversight Committee to formulate the vision of the new Department, and he continued to support its efforts throughout his tenure as the County's top leader. He notes:

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 who are in most need.

As both an academician concerned with social policy and an active volunteer in community-based agencies and organizations, **Moe Coleman** has a long-term perspective on the service needs of low-income neighborhoods. He cites DHS' responsiveness, its commitment to integrated holistic services, and its open communication:

DHS has become a national leader in innovation of integrated services that are responsive to the community, especially in low-income and minority neighborhoods. ...Its relations with private business, foundations, and the university communities have been unprecedented. ...And, finally, DHS has been open to the press and consumers (through the Director's Action Line and town meetings) as well as through its readable, high quality publications. It has been ten years of remarkable accomplishment!

—**Morton Coleman, PhD**, Professor Emeritus  
University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work

Change is not easy, particularly when it is perceived to affect the quality or availability of services. The state-mandated shift to managed care for consumers of behavioral health services covered by Medicaid caused considerable anxiety. Based on the work of a broadly representative planning committee, the resulting entity, HealthChoices, and other behavioral health initiatives, have won the support of both consumers and providers. The following observations are from **Diane Holder**, who worked closely with DHS on the design of HealthChoices, and **Dick Jevon**, a staunch advocate for mental health consumers.



HealthChoices, Allegheny County's unique public-private partnership with Community Care Behavioral Health, has become a national model for serving severely and persistently mentally ill individuals as well as those with addiction disorders. 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, including access to mental health, education, and social services for children at home, in school, and in the community, are providing exceptional services with exceptional results.

—**Diane Holder**, *President, UPMC Health Plan and UPMC Insurance Services Division*

When the State decided in the mid-1990s to embrace managed care for Medicaid recipients, many of us were concerned that the money spent on treatment and support would be significantly reduced. [DHS listened to us, and] today we have an effectively functioning citizen oversight entity for the Medicaid managed behavioral health care, and we can say that "HealthChoices" is succeeding. Access, quality of care, and the number served have increased and improved.

—**Richard Jevon**, *DHS family member/mental health advocate*

No program, over the years, has attracted so much criticism, albeit much of it justified, as child protective services. Formerly called Children and Youth Services (CYS) and later renamed the Office of Children, Youth, and Families (CYF), these services have undergone major changes, reducing the number of children in foster care and the time they spend there, involving families in shared decision-making, coordinating services, and—all the while—ensuring children's safety. The results have garnered attention, nationally and locally, from the media, human services professionals, providers, and consumers.

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." In Allegheny County, they remove the risk instead of the child.

—**Richard Wexler**, *Executive Director, National Coalition for Child Protection Reform*

In light of the rising number of child abuse cases in the United States, some cities and states are overhauling their child welfare systems to better protect children. Pittsburgh, for instance, turned its once-troubled system into what child advocates point to as a model for the rest of the country. ...In Allegheny County, social workers fight to keep families together.

—**Pierre Thomas**, *on ABC World News Tonight, April 26, 2005*



Just six years ago, Allegheny County had a child welfare system in crisis. What did they do? They changed standard procedures, standard philosophy, starting with the children who need, for their own safety, to be taken from their parents' care. The savings have been remarkable: Intervention and prevention programs have reduced the number of children taken from their families. ...And more families get their children back.

—**Beth Nissen**, *on CNN Newsnight with Aaron Brown, aired August 14, 2002*

In our work with DHS over the past ten years, we have found the staff to be visionaries who believe in such strength-based child welfare models as family preservation and reunification, family group decision-making, male mentoring, and "First Steps" prevention program. Community events, such as the annual Families United Celebration, bring providers and families together in a social setting. We are proud to be partners in implementing many of these cutting-edge programs that form a national model for protecting and nurturing children.

—**Jerome Taylor, PhD**, *Executive Director, Center for Family Excellence, Inc.*

A number of other DHS programs have received national recognition. The System of Care Initiative (SOC1), which provides mental health and support services to children through community partnerships, has been hailed repeatedly as a national model for cultural competency and communication. HumanServices.net, a community collaboration in information management, received the 2006 Distinguished Systems Award from the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA). And, the Allegheny County State Forensic Support Program was one of six programs, of more than 1,000 applicants, chosen for the Innovations in American Government Award of Harvard University's Ash Institute. It won the plaudits of the American Public Human Services Association and *The New York Times*.

The prestigious Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government...is testimony to the quality and excellence of DHS' 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.

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



Nowhere has the effort to improve the re-entry process been more successful, and had more bipartisan support, than in Pittsburgh. One program, sponsored by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services for offenders with mental illness coming out of Pennsylvania prisons, has reduced recidivism to only 9.9 percent [compared to 67 percent nationally]. The average cost is \$3,000 a person, well below the national average of \$25,000 a year for a prison inmate.

—**Fox Butterfield**, “*Repaving the Long Road Out of Prison*” in *The New York Times*, May 4, 2004

A major barrier to providing the holistic care that individuals and families need is the categorization of funding that limits access to various services, requires consumers to work through multiple counselors or case managers, and often discourages new approaches because no funding is earmarked for them. Fortunately, some state officials like Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Secretary **Estelle Richman** are dismantling the “silo” approach to funding. (“We need to focus on what children and families need and not on how to sort money into different buckets,” she told a University of Pittsburgh Law School audience.)

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

Allegheny County Department of Human Services’ strategy of maximizing funding streams while not allowing those funding streams to dictate practice has proved to be enormously successful. The integrated services approach can be modeled throughout the country. 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 clients.

In the meantime, however, a unique collaboration on the part of local foundations helped DHS to do just that—meet consumers’ needs despite restrictive funding guidelines. That collaborative, the Human Services Integration Fund, was convened by The Pittsburgh Foundation and has supported a number of initiatives. Here are the observations of three participating foundation officers:

In ten years, a true cultural change has taken place. ...One key to this success has been the creative partnership of DHS with Pittsburgh’s foundation community. The Heinz Endowments has been proud to partner with the Department in the development of Allegheny County’s Family Support System. There are now thirty-two family support centers in Allegheny County, funded by DHS for operations and quality assurance and by The Heinz Endowments for technical assistance and professional development. ...This partnership also resulted in the creation of the Human Services Integration Fund (HSIF), which pools the more flexible foundation resources to support critical projects that cannot be funded through otherwise restricted government funds.

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

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation is honored to have supported the Department in its efforts to integrate its services, evaluate its progress, and improve the manner in which it develops and executes its programs. Our grants, totaling about half a million dollars since 1997, supported a comprehensive evaluation that allowed the County to do the quality planning that solely public budgets rarely allow. This initial investment seeded, among other improvements, growth in behavioral health programming capacity, child welfare system repairs, and new methods of developing, providing, and evaluating services for seniors.

—**Karen Wolk Feinstein, PhD**, President, Jewish Healthcare Foundation

The DHS commitment to collaboration has spanned the age continuum. The BJWL 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. ...What’s more, this initiative served as a model for a new collaboration to promote wellness, socialization, community building, and empowerment among residents of senior high-rise buildings. The Senior Living Enhancement Program and the BJWL Fund each employ residents to serve more than 1,000 consumers in multiple sites as a partnership of DHS, The Pittsburgh Foundation, and the housing authorities. Neither would have been possible without DHS support, funding, and leadership.

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



Communication—with our consumers and the public, with policy-makers and service providers, with our own staff, and with the media—continues to be the cornerstone of everything we do. We share information and we listen to feedback. Comments like these reassure us that we are, indeed, responding to the community needs.

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 consumers' 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.*

We salute DHS for its willingness to hear public testimony and respond to concerns. You have always been open to hear the good, the bad, and the ugly...and for keeping disability issues front and center.

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

DHS has always had an open ear to our issues and has been willing to take steps to resolve glitches in the system. Our staff has benefited greatly from DHS supportive services and workshops and has found a valuable resource in the Director's Action Line and in access to the DHS website. DHS has also been exceptionally responsive to the needs of county residents. Finally, DHS leadership in the response to Hurricane Katrina demonstrates a commitment to the compelling needs of the broader community.

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



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. ...The momentum was breathtaking and heartwarming. ...It was this spirit and the administrative planning that, in the words of one participant, “showed Pittsburgh at its best.”

—**Clarke Thomas**, *Post-Gazette senior editor, in Hurricane Katrina: A Community's Response to a National Disaster (University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics)*

For years my family counted on the Department of Human Services for help with winter heating bills, but now—gratefully—we are able to maintain our heating services on our own. Thanks to DHS mental health and addiction services, my husband and I have been in recovery for almost ten years, and we now are helping others to access these services and to help themselves. DHS has helped me get back to job training, computer skills, and employment, and our family benefited, too, from Project Prom. DHS has changed my life.

—**Jeannette Lee**, *DHS consumer*

You understand, as Fred Rogers 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., producers of “Mister Rogers' Neighborhood”*

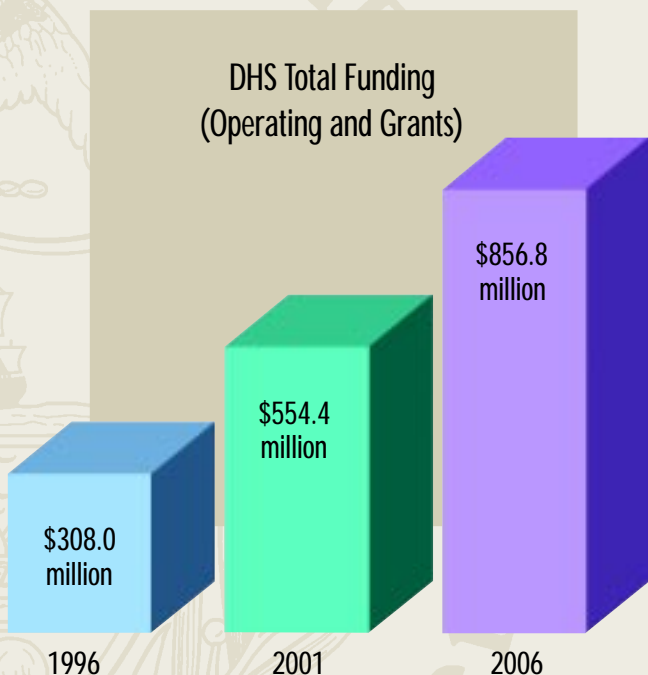
DHS is honored by the positive feedback we received about the progress of the last decade. We are the first to say that the job is far from complete, and we appreciate the many suggestions we received—at public meetings and in writing—when we asked for help in setting the direction for the next ten years. The full text of the responses we received is available on the DHS website: [www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs](http://www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs).

### The bottom line...

is that the redesign of human services has significantly increased both the quality and quantity of services, increasing their comprehensiveness and appropriateness.

As a result, Allegheny County residents are benefiting from an investment of funds that has more than doubled over the last decade—but County taxpayers are assuming an even smaller proportion of those costs: 3.6 percent today compared with 8.6 percent in 1996.

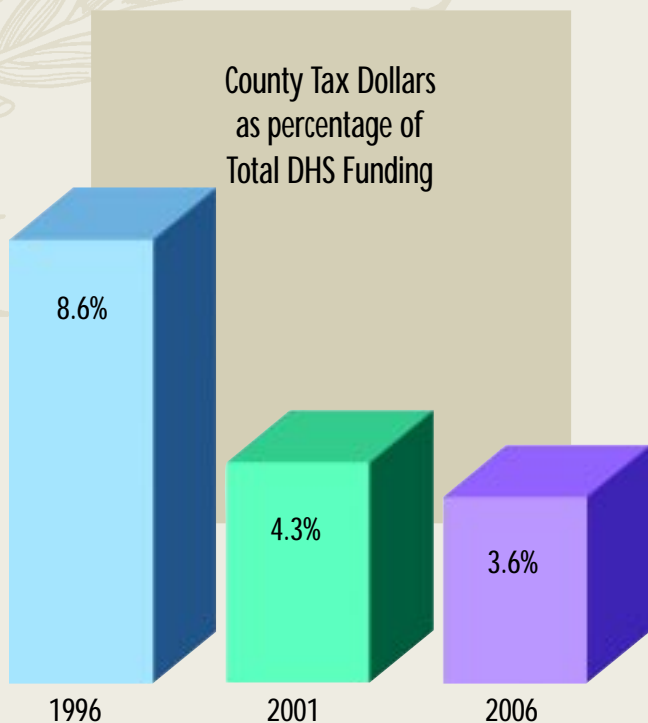
A number of the changes have resulted in net savings by utilizing less-restrictive settings and providing supports that keep families intact and reduce recidivism. Here are some of the comments we received on our cost effectiveness:



Helping families keep their children saves money, too. Placing a child in foster care in Allegheny County costs \$25,000 a year. Providing intensive support to a family is \$10,000 or less.

— **Pierre Thomas**, on ABC World News Tonight, April 26, 2005

The [Allegheny County State Forensic Support Program] has reduced recidivism to only 9.9 percent. The average cost is \$3,000 a person, well below the national average of \$25,000 a year for a prison inmate.  
— **Fox Butterfield**, "Repaving the Long Road Out of Prison" in The New York Times, May 4, 2004



The Urban League/CYF Housing Counseling/Location Program has saved \$12 for every \$1 spent in prevention cases—where placement was avoided—(a total of nearly \$2 million). For the families who 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.

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





## DHS Guiding Principles

To meet the comprehensive human service needs of Allegheny County through a full continuum of services that are:

- **Holistic**– Information Exchange, Prevention, Early Intervention, Case Management & Crisis Intervention, and After Care.
- **High quality**– reflecting best practices in case management, counseling, and treatment.
- **Readily accessible**– in natural, least-restrictive settings, often community-based.
- **Strengths-based**– focusing on the capabilities of individuals and families, not their deficits.
- **Culturally competent**– demonstrating respect for individuals, their goals, and preferences.
- **Individually tailored and empowering**– by building confidence and shared decision-making as routes to independence rather than dependency.



Dan Onorato, *Allegheny County Chief Executive*

James M. Flynn, Jr., *Allegheny County Manager*

Marc Cherna, *DHS Director*

One Smithfield Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
412-350-5701

Produced by the DHS Office of Community Relations  
Karen L. Blumen, Deputy Director  
December 2006

Writing - Matrix Communications Associates  
Design - PUSH Media