

Allegheny County Department of Human Services  
Office of Community Services

Strategic Plan for Our Work as the Community Action Agency for Allegheny County

November 2021

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## I. Background Information

Allegheny County Department of Human Services is the designated community action agency for Allegheny County not including City of Pittsburgh, which is served by the non-profit community action agency, Pittsburgh Community Services, Inc. Allegheny County Department of Human Services is the designated eligible entity for the receipt of federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds, which support core services and operations of community action agencies. The CSBG Act of 1998 along with federal and state directives define the scope of work and attendant requirements for CSBG.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services enacted organizational standards in 2016 for CSBG eligible entities which include requirements for strategic planning. Compliance with organizational standards is monitored by Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development which is the lead agency for CSBG administration and oversight of community action agencies in PA. Strategic planning falls under the thematic category of vision and direction. The strategic plan sets the tone for staff and board and is a key leadership and management tool for the agency. Organizational standards for strategic planning include:

1. The agency has a strategic plan no less than every 5 years which has been reviewed and accepted by the board.
2. The strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, re-vitalization of low-income communities, and empowerment of persons with low-income to become more self-sufficient.
3. The strategic plan contains family, agency, and community goals.
4. Customer satisfaction data is included in the strategic planning process.
5. The board receives information on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan no less than every 12 months.

A committee of the Community Services Advisory Council, the advisory board for the community action work of the Office of Community Services, and staff in the Office of Community Services and the Office of Analytics, Technology, and Planning, adopted a strategic planning process which informed the content for the strategic plan. The strategic plan's core sections include Vision and Mission, Values, Community Assessment, Current Services, Theory of Change, Strategic Goals, Outcomes and Results.

## II. Vision and Mission

### **Vision**

The vision of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services is to create an accessible, culturally competent, integrated and comprehensive human services system that ensures individually tailored, seamless and holistic services to Allegheny County residents, in particular the county's vulnerable populations.

Adding to this vision for our work as community action adopted from *Community Action Partnership* is our belief that with hope, adequate resources and opportunities, everyone can reach their fullest potential.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Office of Community Services (OCS) is to provide human services that empower people, strengthen families, and work to build a healthy, connected community. Through more than 100 community-based agencies and direct services, OCS offers supports, rooted in solid data and best practices, that help prevent crises, stabilize households, and create opportunities to thrive.

This mission statement replaces the original mission statement adopted when the federal CSBG organizational standards were published in 2016.

### III. Values

Allegheny County Department of Human Services has adopted these values.

- All services, policies and processes will be informed by a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Service integration begins with the individuals and families we serve.
- Individuals and families have the capacity to identify their own strengths, needs and goals; create relationships; and take steps necessary to accomplish these goals.
- People sustain their health and wellness with the support and assistance of their families and/or natural supports.
- Individualized and comprehensive services should be provided to people based on their unique needs.
- All services must be high-quality, accessible, and aligned with person and family strengths, needs and goals.
- All communities and populations have unique cultural characteristics.

The Office of Community Services adopts these values to further articulate our community action work:

- People should be treated with dignity and respect.
- No one should be forced to endure the hardships of poverty.
- It is important to bring hope to the persons we serve coupled with adequate resources and opportunities so everyone can reach their fullest potential.
- We strive for innovation and excellence through partnerships and collaborations.

## IV. Community Assessment

From May through August 2021, Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) engaged in a community needs assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to determine how DHS can best address the needs of individuals and families living in poverty and promote individual and family stability and economic security using Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funds and other flexible funding across the agency. The assessment included collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from community members, service providers, and other sources. The community assessment is completed every 3 years and serves as the foundation upon which strategic goals to address poverty and to promote stability and economic security are identified.

Key findings from the community assessment are reported here.

- The incidence of poverty varies widely by household status, race, ethnicity, education, and employment. The rate of poverty is more than double the County average among single mothers, Black and multiracial residents, and those with less than a high school degree.
- Need remains persistently high in McKees Rocks and Stowe, sections of Penn Hills and Wilkinsburg, much of the Monongahela River Valley, and sections of Harrison Township.
- Less than half of survey respondents were satisfied with their ability to meet their family's everyday basic needs.
- Wages are insufficient to cover many working families' basic needs expenses.
- Nearly all respondents report barriers to employment. Top barriers include difficulty accessing child and dependent care, transportation to a job, housing, mental health care; and finding the right jobs that are high quality and match their skills and training.
- All stakeholders (community members, Human Services providers, Workforce providers, and Community Services Advisory Council members) identified basic needs as the highest-priority area for investment to promote economic security.

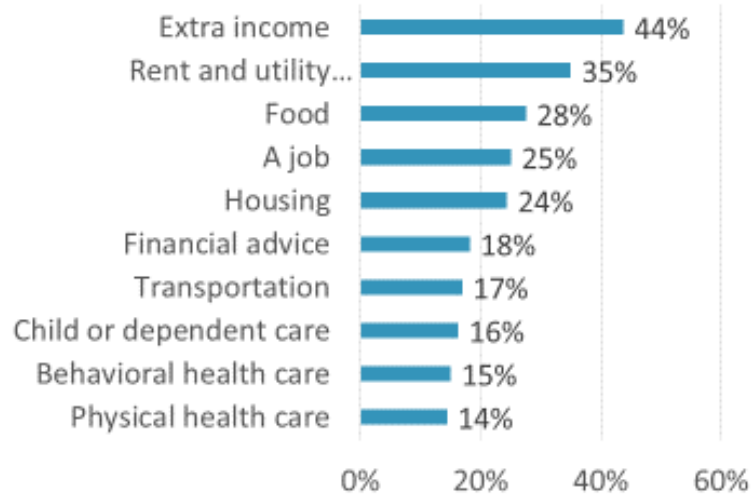
Respondents were asked to choose which needs were most urgent for them and most of the ten highest-ranked urgent needs were related to basic needs. Extra income, rent and utility assistance, food, and housing topped the lists of between a quarter and half (24-44%) of all respondents. Likewise, both DHS Human Services Providers and Community Services Advisory Council members ranked basic needs as the highest-priority area for DHS investment. Employment was also ranked highly by a quarter (25%) of respondents.

Respondents were also asked to choose which goals were most important to them. Nearly half of all respondents ranked wealth building goals, including paying off debts and growing a savings account, as most important to them. Other wealth building goals, including improving credit score and buying a house, were also ranked highly (by 26.7% and 22.9% of respondents, respectively).

Please see the charts following outlining the top ranked needs and top ranked goals.

## Top Needs

Needs, by Percentage of Respondents Ranking as Most Urgent



## Top Goals

Goals, by Percentage of Respondents Ranking as Most Important



## V. Current Services and Theory of Change

The services funded with CSBG funds, number of persons served 2019 through 3 quarters 2021, demographic information when available regarding higher poverty indicators, the relationship of the services to community needs (CN) identified in the community assessment, and outcomes achieved are reported here. Check (✓) marks designate the community needs (CN) addressed by each service.

Service	Service Definition	2019 Persons Served	2020 Persons Served	2021 Persons Served (3 quarters)	Less than high school diploma	Multi-racial	Black	Female headed household with children	CN - Extra income	CN - Rent and utility assistance	CN - Food	CN - A job	CN - Housing	CN - Financial advice	CN - Transportation	CN - Child and dependent care	CN - Behavioral health care	CN - Physical health care	Providers and Notes
Self-sufficiency case management	The Self-Sufficiency Program helps individuals and families achieve improved stability and economic security. The program helps people to overcome barriers and build upon their interests and strengths while accessing community services and supports.	105	107	109	NA	10%	44%	29%		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Providers include Allegheny Valley Association of Churches, Human Services Center, North Hills Community Outreach, Rainbow Kitchen, South Hills Interfaith Ministries. South Hills Interfaith Ministries became a provider in 2021 resulting in coverage in communities who lacked coverage.
CCAC modern office systems training	Computer literacy classes to help people enhance skills using Microsoft Office Systems to access employment positions which require these skills.	17	10	0	NA	13%	38%	30%				✓							Program ended August 2020



Service	Service Definition	2019 Persons Served	2020 Persons Served	2021 Persons Served (3 quarters)	Less than high school diploma	Multiracial	Black	Female headed household with children	CN – Extra Income	CN – Rent and Utility Assistance	CN - Food	CN – A Job	CN - Housing	CN – Financial Advise	CN - Transportation	CN – Child and Dependent Care	CN-Behavioral health Care	CN – Physical health Care	Providers and Notes
CCAC career prep and training	Career Preparation and Training is designed to assist job seekers explore in-demand career fields. This program consists of a Career Preparation phase as a pre-requisite to a Career Training phase where participants work towards a certification or credential to assist with accessing jobs in specific employment fields.	0	3	4	NA	NA	100%	100%				✓							Replaced modern office systems training program. Career prep started December 2020. Persons served in 2020 completed career prep only. Persons served in 2021 include 2020 career prep completers and persons who began career training in 2021.
Employment assistance	MVI's Workforce & Business Development program assists unemployed and under-employed Mon Valley residents to prepare for and access employment opportunities that exist in the region. Classroom work, one-on-one counseling, and career exploration workshops expose participants to employment and career advancement opportunities within the region.	32	30	33	NA	3%	54%	NA				✓		✓					Mon Valley Initiative is the provider.
dsTransportation	This program helps people stabilize their transportation situation during times of financial difficulty who need help getting to their job, looking for a job, or transportation to school.	76	83	64	NA	6%	22%	33%				✓			✓				North Hills Community Outreach, Allegheny Valley Association of Churches, South Hills Interfaith Ministries are the providers.

Service	Service Definition	2019 Persons Served	2020 Persons Served	2021 Persons Served (3 quarters)	Less than high school diploma	Multiracial	Black	Female headed household with children	CN – Extra Income	CN – Rent and Utility Assistance	CN - Food	CN – A Job	CN - Housing	CN – Financial Advice	CN - Transportation	CN – Child and Dependent Care	CN – Behavioral health Care	CN – Physical health Care	Providers and Notes
DHS tax preparation	The VITA program provides free tax preparation services for income-eligible individuals. VITA helps households file their taxes and maximize their tax refunds.	284	187	145	NA	NA	46%	22%	✓										DHS is the provider.
Mon Valley tax preparation	The VITA program provides free tax preparation services to income-eligible individuals. VITA ensures that Mon Valley residents are able to get their taxes done for free and get connected to a wide-range of other needed community services. Free tax preparation ensures that families are not paying for a service and/or utilizing a predatory lending vehicle to get an advance on their refund.	DHS did not fund	584	551	NA	16%	46%	Data not available	✓										Human Services Center is the provider
Financial literacy and empowerment classes	Serves individuals seeking financial literacy assistance through financial literacy workshops. The goal is to increase the financial knowledge and skills of Mon Valley residents. Mon Valley residents develop their financial knowledge and skills in areas such as budgeting, savings, credit, banking, and taxes.	11	400	538	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available						✓					Human Services Center is the provider

Service	Service Definition	2019 Persons Served	2020 Persons Served	2021 Persons Served (# quarters)	Less than high school diploma	Multiracial	Black	Female Headed household with children	CN – Extra Income	CN- Rent and Utility Assistance	CN - Food	CN – A Job	CN - Housing	CN – Financial Advice	CN - Transportation	CN – Child and dependent care	CN – Behavioral health care	CN – Physical health care	Providers and Notes
Basic needs and emergency assistance	Basic needs and emergency assistance services assist eligible persons to meet basic and urgent needs which persons are not able to meet on their own due to loss of income, reduced income, or insufficient income.	0	184 (September – December)	241	Data not available	8%	37%	38%		✓	✓		✓		✓				Allegheny Valley Association of Churches, Human Services Center, North Hills Community Outreach, South Hills Interfaith Ministries are the providers. CSBG CARES Supplemental funds support this service.
Employment assistance	Support and assistance for unemployed and underemployed adults (18 years of age and older) through Partner 4 Work and Career Link's Career Services Expansion to obtain and retain living wage employment. Enrollment in recognized career training programs is available for persons who want to obtain skills and credentials for industry specific jobs.	0	6 (November – December)	55	3	Data not available	91%	18%				✓							Partner 4 Work and Career Link are providers. CSBG CARES Supplemental funds support this service.

Service	Outcome Domain	Number of Persons Working Towards One or More Outcomes (2019, 2020, 3 quarters 2021)	Number of Persons Achieved One or More Outcomes	Percentage of Persons Who Achieved One or More Outcomes
Self-sufficiency case management	Employment	162	132	81%
	Income and Asset Building	189	104	55%
	Housing	108	93	86%
	Health and Social/Behavioral	95	60	63%
Job/Career Training (CCAC MOST and Career Prep and Training)	Education and Cognitive Development	24	13	54%
	Employment	12	7	58%
Employment Assistance (MVI and P4W)	Employment	130	56	43%
	Education and Cognitive Development Indicators	10	5	50%

Basic Needs and Emergency Assistance	Basic Needs	386	372	96%
	Housing	30	30	100%
Self-Sufficiency Case Management Clients	Selected Outcome Indicators		Self-Sufficiency Clients Who Achieved Outcomes	
	Employment Indicators	Unemployed obtain employment up to living wage	43	
		Unemployed obtain employment at living wage	27	
		Underemployed obtain employment at living wage	5	
	Income and Asset Building Indicators	Report improved financial well-being	48	
		Meet basic needs for 90 days	44	
		Improve credit scores	20	
		Increased savings	29	
		Established savings	11	
		Used savings to purchase asset	7	
	Housing Indicators	Purchased home	2	
		Obtain safe and affordable housing	26	
		Avoided eviction	17	
		Avoided foreclosure	5	
	Health and Social/Behavioral Indicators	Improved energy efficiency	17	
Improved physical health		30		
improved behavioral health		29		
	Improved parenting and caregiver skills	19		

	Job and career training outcome indicators		Number Who Achieved Outcomes
Job/Career Training (CCAC MOST and Career Prep and Training)	Education and Cognitive Development Indicators	Obtain recognized certificate, credential, or degree related to achievement of educational or vocational skills	13
	Employment Indicators	Unemployed obtain employment at living wage	5
		Unemployed obtain employment up to living wage	1
Employment Assistance (MVI and P4W)	Employment Indicators	Unemployed obtain employment at living wage	42
		Unemployed obtain employment up to living wage	14
	Education and Cognitive Development Indicators	Obtain recognized certificate, credential, or degree related to achievement of educational or vocational skills	5

# OCS Economic Security Programming Theory of Change

**Economic security** means having the resources necessary to pay one's bills, be resilient to financial shocks, and be on track to meet one's financial goals. It fosters autonomy and well-being.

## How we do our work

- This theory of change focuses on economic security, just one important determinant of health and well-being. The pathway to economic security consists of tools, knowledge, relationships, and resources within five key areas. Below we explain what each area (pillar) is and why we believe it is important. This theory of change is meant to guide our selection and evaluation of services so that we can be sure we're offering the right array.
- We meet people where they are and address their most pressing needs first. Not everyone will need support with all five pillars. People may work with us at different stages in their journey and we want to be able to support them wherever they are. And it may not be a linear process. This also means we may not always know if those we work with eventually attain Economic Security.
- We recognize that individuals and families have complex lives and may be interacting with many systems (e.g. pre-K – 12 education; physical health; behavioral health; criminal justice; neighborhoods and built environment; community and culture; and not least, institutionalized racism) all of which impact their ability to pursue or attain economic security. While OCS does not control these other systems directly, our intention is to design and support services that acknowledge and hopefully help to mitigate any negative impact these other systems have on people's lives.

## Changes we seek:

### Individuals and families have...

- stable housing, child and dependent care, food, transportation, health care, and technology that enables their participation in work and school.
- a network to gain access to support, information, power, and resources.
- the qualifications (certificate, degree, or experience) necessary to obtain the living-wage job of their choice.
- employment in a living-wage job.
- sufficient assets to withstand financial shocks and build wealth.

## Five Pillars of the Bridge to Economic Security

**Basic needs** include housing, child and dependent care, food, transportation, health care, and technology.

- We focus on access to basic needs because we believe it is extremely hard for someone to work on long term economic goals until they are out of crisis, stabilized and meeting their core needs
- We provide basic needs as our **core foundational work**

**Social capital** is the number and strength of one's social relationships. These include natural supports (relationships developed in everyday community life), peers, and mentors.

- We focus on social capital because it provides access to support, information, power, and resources. Social capital can help people learn about jobs, get hired, and advance their interests.
- We recognize that building social capital is not a service we can fund as a stand-alone support. Instead, we seek to identify ways we can **integrate opportunities for people to build social capital while participating** in other services and activities.

**Postsecondary education and training** leads to obtaining work experience, certificates and technical degrees, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees.

- We focus on education and training because they are often prerequisites to accessing jobs that provide a living wage.
- Our focus here is finding ways to **support people to overcome challenges** (lack of information, cost, the time investment required, and barriers to accessing some of the basic needs) so they can access existing postsecondary education and training opportunities.

**Employment** is having paid work.

- We focus on employment because a living-wage job enables people to meet their families' financial needs, save for the future, and exercise autonomy.
- Our focus is to first learn more from the people we serve to better understand why they may struggle to identify, gain and/or maintain employment. And then similar to our approach for training, we will work **to develop supports to overcome those challenges**.

**Wealth building** includes managing debt and building assets.

- We focus on wealth building because assets such as savings, homes, pensions, and small businesses can strengthen a family's safety net, sustain seniors in retirement, and give lower-income people a foothold on the economic ladder.
- Our intention is to learn all of the asset building opportunities that currently exist in the county for low-income people, potentially expand some as needed and **facilitate connections** to these opportunities.



## VI. Strategic Goals

Strategic goals which will guide our work for the next 3 years have an overall focus on reducing poverty, re-vitalizing low-income communities, and empowering persons with low-income to become more self-sufficient. Strategic goals align with our vision and mission, our values, key findings from our community assessment, and our Economic Security Theory of Change. Strategic goals encompass family, agency, and community goals. The results data from our 2021 customer satisfaction survey for persons who received self-sufficiency case management and employment assistance align with our strategic goals.

### **Families' basic needs will be met (family goal)**

Our *Theory of Change for Economic Security (TOC)* identifies families meeting their basic needs including food, stable housing, clothing, transportation, child and dependent care, health care, and technology as essential to them working on long-term economic goals. For families to be able to thrive and prosper, their basic needs must be met. Our *TOC* envisions families having the resources available to pay bills, be resilient to financial shocks, and meet financial goals. Our model fosters autonomy and well-being while recognizing the importance of families with social connections and natural supports, as these connections and supports signify important relationships for families. Our work will help families to meet their basic needs.

### **Families will build social capital through social relationships and natural supports (family and community goal)**

Our *TOC* identifies social capital as the number and strength of one's social relationships including natural supports which are relationships developed in everyday community life with family members, friends, peers, and mentors. These relationships provide access to support, information, power, and resources. These relationships can help with meeting basic needs as well as to thrive and prosper. Our *TOC* places an emphasis upon building social capital as an integrated component of services which support basic needs and long-term economic goals. Our work will help families build their social capital, social relationships, and natural supports.

### **Families will achieve financial wellness (family goal)**

Our *TOC* identifies building wealth as one of the pillars of building economic security. Building wealth starts with managing debt, living on a family budget, establishing savings, and building assets. Building wealth helps strengthen a family's safety net. Our work will help families improve their financial well-being and have a path towards building family wealth.

### **Families will obtain employment that pays a living wage (family goal)**

Our *TOC* includes employment that pays a living wage as this enables families to meet their financial needs, save for the future, and exercise autonomy. Our work will focus on helping families secure employment that pays a living wage.

**Families will obtain postsecondary education and training (family goal)**

Our *TOC* focuses on obtaining postsecondary education and training because this is often a prerequisite to obtaining employment that pays a living wage. Our work will help families overcome challenges and barriers to accessing postsecondary education and training.

**Families with physical and/or behavioral health challenges will improve their health (family goal)**

Our *TOC* has an emphasis on families meeting basic needs of which health care is one basic need. Improving physical and/or behavioral health is an area of need as well as a goal identified by families who participated in the community needs assessment. Improving physical and/or behavioral health when identified as a challenge or barrier is an essential component of families achieving improved stability and economic security. Our work will help families connect to health care resources and support their goal of improving health.

**Expanded program services will prioritize high need communities which lack services that focus on improved stability and economic security as identified in the Community Need Index Report 2021 (agency and community goals)**

The Community Need Index Report 2021 identifies family needs as remaining persistently high in McKees Rocks and Stowe, sections of Penn Hills and Wilkinsburg, much of the Monongahela River Valley, and sections of Harrison Township.

## VII. Desired Results

The desired results we want to achieve over the next 3 years are focused on the outcomes our families want to achieve. There are specific outcome indicators we report our community action work which align with our strategic goals. We will also establish new outcome indicators for our strategic goals where none exist. The outcome indicators which we will track and report for our strategic goals are listed after each goal.

### **Families' basic needs will be met.**

The number of individuals who achieved and maintained capacity to meet basic needs for 90 days.

The number of individuals who obtained one or more public benefits to meet basic needs.

The number of individuals who received assistance to help meet basic needs.

The number of households who obtained safe and affordable housing.

The number of households who maintained safe and affordable housing for 90 days.

### **Families will build social capital through social relationships and natural supports.**

The number of Community Action program participants who establish social relationships and natural supports.

The number of Community Action program participants who improved their social networks.

The number of Community Action program participants who gained other skills, knowledge and abilities to enhance their ability to engage.

### **Families will achieve financial wellness.**

The number of individuals who opened a savings account or IDA.

The number of individuals who increased their savings.

The number of individuals who used their savings to purchase an asset.

Of the above, the number of individuals who purchased a home.

The number of individuals who improved their credit scores.

The number of individuals engaged with the Community Action Agency who report improved financial well-being.

### **Families will obtain employment that pays a living wage.**

The number of unemployed adults who obtained employment (with a living wage or higher).

The number of unemployed adults who obtained and maintained employment for at least 90 days (with a living wage or higher).

The number of employed participants in a career-advancement related program who entered or transitioned into a position that provided increased income and/or benefits.

The number of underemployed adults who obtained employment at a living wage or higher.

### **Families will obtain postsecondary education and training.**

The number of adults who demonstrated improved basic education.

The number of individuals who obtained a high school diploma and/or obtained an equivalency certificate or diploma.

The number of individuals who obtained a recognized credential, certificate, or degree relating to the achievement of educational or vocational skills.

The number of individuals who obtained an Associate's degree.

The number of individuals who obtained a Bachelor's degree.

**Families with physical and/or behavioral health challenges will improve their health.**

The number of individuals who demonstrated increased nutrition skills (e.g. cooking, shopping, and growing food).

The number of individuals who demonstrated improved physical health and well-being.

The number of individuals who demonstrated improved mental and behavioral health and well-being.

The number of individuals who improved skills related to the adult role of parents/ caregivers.

The number of seniors (65+) who maintained an independent living situation.

The number of individuals with disabilities who maintained an independent living situation.

The number of individuals with chronic illness who maintained an independent living situation.

**New or expanded program services will prioritize high need communities which lack services that focus on improved stability and economic security as identified in the Community Need Index Report 2021 (agency and community goals)**

Identify in communities where family needs remain persistently high (McKees Rocks and Stowe, sections of Penn Hills and Wilkinsburg, much of Monongahela River Valley, sections of Harrison Township) the availability of services that focus on improved stability and economic security.

Identify the number of families who access these services in these communities compared to the level of need.

Identify opportunities and resources to develop new and/or expanded services in high need communities that focus on improved stability and economic security.

## VIII. Appendix 1

A committee of the Community Services Advisory Council, the advisory board for the community action work of the Office of Community Services, and staff in the Office of Community Services and the Office of Analytics, Technology, and Planning, implemented a strategic planning process which informed the content for the strategic plan. The strategic planning process consisted of 3 strategic planning sessions of 1.5 hours each and included a review and discussion of written materials and key decisions and action steps towards drafting of the strategic plan.

Community Services Advisory Council committee members included Dillon Moore, TalainaMaria Peterson, Mike Selep. Department of Human Services staff on the committee included John Litz and Mara Schwabenbauer from the Office of Community services and Kara McFadden from the Office of Analytics, Technology and planning.