

DHS
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Human Services *Development Fund*

As the Director of the Department of Human Services, I am continually heartened by the resiliency demonstrated by the tens of thousands of individuals who benefit from the services offered by DHS and our more than 300 contracted provider agencies. These services are supported by a wide variety of funding entities (e.g., federal grants, state and county funds, foundation contributions), and this funding is often restricted to a specific program or population.

But what happens when an individual who does not fall within the eligibility requirements of traditional funding streams is in need of service in order to remain safe, healthy or independent? One of the only sources of funding that allows for more discretion in spending is the Human Services Development Fund (HSDF). Through HSDF monies, the lives of persons in need are made manageable. What follows are two stories that, while unique to the individuals involved, are representative of the hundreds of people who depend on HSDF-funded services each day.



Toni, 54, finds a reason to smile when she talks about her life now. All things considered, she feels she is one of the fortunate ones. Yes, she has to contend with severe osteoarthritis in her knees that keeps her from walking, painful lipedema that leaves her with leg sores that require frequent treatment, and recurring bouts of asthma that limit her activity level even further. These physical

limitations could have resulted in the need for a structured residential placement, but instead, Toni is one of the thousands of individuals able to remain in her home, and independent, thanks to services provided through HSDF.

Just over a year ago, Toni was in a different phase of her life. She found herself alone with her struggles following the death of her husband.

“He died of brain cancer October a year ago,” Toni recalled. “Before he got sick, he used to do things to help me – the laundry, shopping, some of the housework. I went through a sad period after his death. My health suffered because I pulled away from everyone. My arthritis and the sores on my legs got so bad that I needed to start using a motorized wheelchair instead of a walker, even in my apartment.

“I live in a high rise operated by HAP [Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh] in a one-bedroom apartment designed to accommodate a physically disabled person. When I started using my chair, I asked the Authority to provide reasonable accommodation for me. That’s when I got the automatic door and that’s when I got a referral to the agency that has come to my rescue.”

Toni stays active. Using a wheelchair does not keep her from being the coordinator of the food bank in her building. She is also the elected secretary of the building’s tenant council. Yet, she doesn’t like to think about what her life would be like without the assistance provided by her visiting caregivers.

Marc Cherna
Director

Allegheny County Department of Human Services



Rich Fitzgerald
Allegheny County Executive

“I have someone who visits a few times a week to do light housework – change my bed linens, run the sweeper,” Toni said. “She is great. And, I have a wonderful nurse who comes by to change the bandages on my legs and take my vitals. I don’t have to worry that my life is at risk just because I live alone. My neighbors are great, but when they come over, it’s for a visit, not to help me. My family helps some, with shopping and appointments, but not on a daily basis. With this help [from an HSDF-funded agency], I have no worries. I can stay safely independent and live a full life. None of this would be possible without the help I get.”



Sam is living with severe cerebral palsy, which impairs his physical abilities. He arrived in the United States from the Ukraine in the early 1990s. While he was able to walk independently at that time, he depended upon his parents to

provide the care that he needed. When they died in the mid-90s, Sam needed to find a different source of assistance. He took up residency in an assisted-living high-rise apartment building, but the expense was soon more than he could afford. He chose to move to an apartment building that was accessible, and was subsequently referred to an HSDF-funded agency for his in-home services. He credits that agency for making his quality of life possible.

Before telling his story, Sam makes clear his gratitude for all the benefits this country, and more specifically the HSDF funding, has afforded him. “I am so proud to be an American citizen,” Sam said. “In the Ukraine, they have nothing for people with disabilities. In America, it is wonderful. Everything I need, I can get.”

Through HSDF funding, Sam receives assistance with his personal care and hygiene, and while he does his own laundry, care providers help him with light housekeeping as well as with getting dressed and organizing his clothing. When he’s not receiving home-delivered meals, his food is prepared under his supervision using provisions from the building’s food bank.

With his basic needs met, Sam is free to live a full and active life. Riding his motorized wheelchair, he uses accessible public transportation and ACCESS to

do his shopping, go to medical appointments, pay visits to his elected representatives and engage in various advocacy efforts. Sam’s speech may be labored, but his message rings clear.

“I know that without [the agency that provides services to me] I could not exist,” Sam said. “I’m sure that’s true for other people, too.”