

412 Youth Zone supports hopes and dreams of youth, community

With expressions of excitement, hope and gratitude, representatives of Allegheny County, Auberle and other stakeholders on March 16 dedicated the 412 Youth Zone, a one-stop center Downtown where a plethora of services are helping the county's transition-aged youth build bright futures.

Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, Department of Human Services (DHS) Executive Marc Cherna, Diocese of Pittsburgh Bishop David A. Zubik and John P. Lydon, Chief Executive Officer of Auberle human service agency were among keynote speakers during the ceremony at the innovative center. Joining them were Auberle Board Chairman Vince Locher, Aimee Plowman, 412 Youth Center director, and Jeanetta C., a young adult who discussed how the center has helped her.

The center encompasses nearly 14,000 square feet over two floors in the Wood Street Commons building. [Auberle](#), based in McKeesport, operates the 412 Youth Zone under a \$2 million contract with DHS secured through a competitive bidding process. Funding primarily comes through DHS's independent living grants. The center offers everything from recreation to behavioral health counseling and employment services for youth ages 16 to 24. The goal is to help current and former foster youth and youth who are homeless find coordinated, centralized support in their transition to adulthood.

The center developed after a DHS study, "[I'll Never Get Used To It: Young People Living on the Street](#)", detailed the plight of homeless young adults in the county. The study incorporated their opinions, which included a recommendation to start a "one-stop shop" to consolidate services that typically were scattered and not accessed in an efficient way.

With its centralized location, myriad supports and strong volunteer component, the 412 Youth Zone "is really what we envisioned and we are really hopeful that it will improve outcomes for youth in many different ways," Marc said in his remarks at the ceremony.



Representatives of the DHS Youth Support Partners Unit attended the dedication of the 412 Youth Zone center, Downtown. From left are Amanda Hirsh, YSP Unit Manager; Stephanie Robinson, Youth Support Coordinator; DHS Executive Marc Cherna; and YSPs Kelsey Musgrove, Crystal Wilson and Chris Neugebauer.



Marc shares a laugh with Jeanetta C., a Youth Zone participant who spoke at the dedication.

Auberle CEO John Lydon said the center will foremost be a place for a warm welcome for the county's youth, mirroring the service mission of Auberle, a faith-based, Catholic agency. That 'welcoming' atmosphere had been identified by the DHS Youth advisory board, System Improvement through Youth (SITY) as central to any one-stop center, and also by youth at Auberle who gave input into the design of the 412 Youth Zone space. Youth also designed the center's logo and selected the bright colors used on the center's walls and used in its furniture.

"These youth tend to get lost at this point of life. What we're trying to do is give them a sense of belonging regardless of what issues and circumstances they are working through," John said a few months ago as work on the center progressed. "We really want to give the youth a sense of 'This is where you belong, where you feel wanted, loved and helped, and you can just walk in.' "

Jeanetta C., 20, told the audience at the dedication what the 412 Youth Zone has meant to her. "When I am here, I feel loved," she said. "You have a sense of belonging." The center is motivating, she added, explaining she plans to become a certified nursing assistant.

Currently, 412 Youth Zone has 38 partners providing or assisting in the areas of life skills; medical and behavioral health; education; prevention education; housing counseling; workforce training; childcare and parenting support; food (provided and nutrition education); arts; legal aid and recreation. The center is stocked with computers, televisions, a washer and dryer, shower, kitchen and fitness room. Classes such as yoga or the Jim Casey Opportunity Passport financial education program, sponsored by DHS, are held.

Besides Allegheny County and DHS partners in the 412 Youth Zone include Action Housing, Inc.; BNY Mellon Foundation of Southwestern Pennsylvania; Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and Dr. Elizabeth Miller; Heinz Endowments; Massaro Corp.; PPG; The Wilson Group, Sharp Imaging and Information Company of America; Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board; University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs; and UPMC.