

DHS Onboarding Program extends welcome, info to all new employees

To improve employee job engagement, performance and retention, the Department of Human Services has been rolling out a DHS Onboarding Program for county hires as well as contract personnel.

“Onboarding” – sometimes called employment socialization – is a planned process that helps new employees understand an employer’s culture and job expectations. It includes processes designed to make new employees feel welcomed and better connected not only to where they work but to the job they are doing. Consequently, the Onboarding Program begins in several ways before new employees and contract personnel start their actual job.

Stacey Tunie, Performance Improvement Analyst in the Office of Administrative and Information Management Services (AIMS) who specializes in employee engagement and organizational development, leads an Onboarding Team composed of staff from all DHS offices that spent several months examining the department’s needs and existing onboarding practices before developing the Onboarding Program.

Randy Brockington, Deputy Director of AIMS stressed that team members include representatives from across all DHS program and shared-services offices and this effort was not strictly a human resources endeavor. The uniform Onboarding Program consequently reflects the broad-based, collaborative approach used in its development.

“The principle is to make everyone feel like a part of an organization. That helps make each person feel like a vital part of his or her work,” Randy said. “In keeping with the saying, ‘A happy employee is a productive employee.’ “

The Onboarding Program rolls out in three phases to address workspace needs, learning, and continued engagement of the employee in job development. It also closes gaps identified by the Onboarding Team during its review of existing procedures.

The team found that new hires did not always learn the important reasons behind the county forming DHS in 1997, how the department operates and what its mission and values are. That information is crucial to ensuring employees feel connected and purposeful as they do their work. So Phase One of the DHS Onboarding Program now includes a presentation about DHS that is given during a two-part orientation.

The first part of the orientation occurs on the first day of work. New county employees meet with county HR or new contract employees with the contractor’s HR, as appropriate, to learn about time reporting, travel reimbursement and employee manuals, for example.

On the second day of work, new employees and contract personnel attend an integrated orientation: County employees, student interns and contract personnel alike attend a daylong program presented by DHS staff and facilitated by Stacey. The program includes a PowerPoint about DHS history, organizational structure, budget and funding streams, policies and procedures, vision, guiding principles and standards of practice. Four integrated orientations have been held so far.

The integrated orientation also includes training in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Pennsylvania’s mandated reporting requirements. Additionally, new employees and

contract personnel are instructed in how they can keep in touch with DHS operations via the DHS intranet and publications. They also view a welcoming video by DHS Executive Director Marc Cherna.

Both orientation days are part of Phase One of the Onboarding Program. The phase extends DHS's welcome by having Points of Contact in each office ensure that each new worker has everything that is needed to start their work on the first day -- a computer and log-in credentials, for example.

The welcome extends to Phase Two of the Onboarding Program, where employees are assigned a "buddy" in their unit who can answer casual questions. New hires will also receive on-the-job training and a review of job expectations. An email will be sent out to staff announcing the worker's arrival and a personalized "welcome" banner will be displayed.

In Phase Three, new hires will be able to give feedback about their onboarding experiences during online surveys taken after one month and six months on the job. At six months, a performance review will also be conducted.

"The Onboarding Program improves consistency in helping employees to be trained and informed and to know that their skills contribute to the DHS mission," Randy said. "No matter if the worker is hired by the county or by a contractor, we are all joined in the common purpose of supporting the county's vulnerable people by efficiently delivering the highest quality customer service that meets their needs."

The Onboarding and Point of Contact Teams

Members of the Onboarding Team are Arlene Morosko, Service Desk; Bill Kroll, Internet Technology; Carolyn Powers, Human Resources; Cassandra Leffler, Fixed Assets; Eric McGee Hines, Applications; Jamie Regan, HR; Mark Simon, Facilities; Sid Malhotra, Project Management; Todd Kummer, PC Support; Vernon Smith, PC Support and Network services; and Virginia LaBoy, AIMS administration. Virginia also serves as the Point of Contact in the AIMS Office. Other Points of Contact and their offices are Andrea Rudek and Margie Remele, Children, Youth and Families (CYF); Andrea Bustos, Joe Elliott and Courtney Lewis, Office of Community Relations (OCR); Janet Klixbull, Office of Community Service (OCS); Kelly Wilkinson, Integrated Services Program (ISP); Kristen Lamont, Office of Intellectual Disability (OID); Megan Good, Data, Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE); Sue Martone, Office of Behavioral Health (OBH); Sue Niziol, Area Agency on Aging (AAA); and Terry Lane, Executive Office.