

## **DHS selected as Foster America pilot site**

Over the next year, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) will participate in Foster America, an innovative national program designed to use the knowledge and unique skills of talented professionals from the business, public health, and education sectors to address pressing issues in the child welfare system. DHS is one of only two jurisdictions selected as a host site for this ground-breaking program.

Foster America began as a June 2015 conversation among 26 leaders and innovators from the child welfare, education, and social innovation sectors, including Marc Cherna, DHS director, and Erin Dalton, deputy director in the Office of Data Analysis, Research, and Evaluation (DARE). The group felt that while there is a great deal of knowledge inside the child welfare sector, there was an untapped opportunity to build a leadership pipeline for qualified individuals who have desirable skills but may not have a background in the field.

“The question became, ‘How do we bring in these people who have so much to offer, but may never have considered a career in child welfare?’” said Sherry Lachman, founder and CEO of Foster America. “We decided that a fellowship would be the best way to create a ‘dance partnership’: By pairing strong child welfare leaders who have insider expertise with talented professionals with relevant skills from the outside, we could create real innovation and progress.”

Foster America began recruiting in June 2016, and received more than 200 applications from around the country in just three weeks. After a rigorous, four-step selection process, a scant four percent of applicants were selected to the inaugural cohort of fellows.

In October, three of the Foster America fellows began year-long service terms at DHS. Eddy Jones will be working in the Office of Administrative and Information Management Services (AIMS) on multiple shared service projects including fiscal enterprise; IT Service Management; fiscal analysis training; and several business process projects involving Synergy, family support, and application enhancements. Emily Ianacone will be working in DARE on human-centered design, first in behavioral health and then in child welfare. Janine Jelks-Seale will also be working in DARE, with a likely focus on child welfare workforce, leadership, and organizational culture. In 2017, the program will be evaluated to determine next steps.