

Homebuilders is now option for intensive case management

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has implemented an evidence-based, intensive case management program designed to keep children safe while avoiding placement. Called the Homebuilders® Intensive Family Preservation Program, it is being rolled out after hiring and training of staff overseen by the model's developer, the Institute for Family Development of Federal Way, Washington.

After issuing a Request for Proposals, Auberle of McKeesport and Pressley Ridge of the North Side received five-year contracts to provide [Homebuilders®](#) in the county. Each agency hired supervisors and therapists under the auspices of the institute and DHS. Staff were trained in the classroom and in the field and work is progressing to fully implement the model.

Katie Stoehr, Manager of Program Operations in the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF), said DHS selected Homebuilders® as its means of intensive family intervention after researching other evidence-based models.

Homebuilders® will only be used in instances of child safety that would otherwise result in immediate placement or where a child cannot be returned without intensive services, Katie emphasized. Participation is voluntary and referrals to Homebuilders® must be made by CYF administrators. Information and education about the service continues to be distributed to caseworkers.

Fidelity to the model is crucial in achieving results, Katie added, so the practice will be closely monitored to ensure that training and standards implemented by the Institute for Family Development are followed.

Employing Homebuilders® not only fits the Department's practice of working to support families in finding solutions to their needs and keeping them intact, it also boosts DHS's commitment to the [Child Welfare Demonstration Project](#) and its goals, which include reducing congregate care and out-of-family placements.

[Studies](#) show that use of the model results in avoiding of placement or hospitalization for youth in at least 71 percent of cases. The model is listed in the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) [National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices](#).

Each Homebuilders® provider has a team of four therapists and a supervisor. Therapists on average will have a caseload of two families, but it's expected that the teams will be supporting a combined minimum of 18 families yearly. The small caseload reflects the intensive care that therapists will put into cases. They are available around the clock to work with families in devising solutions to myriad issues.

Katie described the intervention as an "all-hands-on-deck" scenario to improve child safety and family functioning. "Therapists will be there right away and as much as they have to be. And the parent has to be willing to do this, too."

Homebuilders® is very much tailored to the family situation. For example, if the issue is that the parent can't get a teen to school, then Homebuilders® will come at 7 a.m. to coach the parent. If the family consists of a single parent who needs but can't develop structure for the family, the therapist will be there during the day to help build structure. "They're getting a family out of crisis and to where they can function and be linked with long-term help if that's what they need," Katie said.

Shelley Leavitt, Ph.D., Associate Director, Institute for Family Development, who attended some of Allegheny County's trainings, likened the service to a "Supernanny" approach to intervention, with therapists present "when everybody's there and everything is going on – that's the time to be there to figure out how to help."

Therapists on average are expected to be involved intensively for four weeks, with follow-up to ensure goals are being met and safety maintained.

Allegheny County is the only jurisdiction in Pennsylvania using Homebuilders®. Other locations where it is in use are in the state of Washington; Louisiana; Florida; Washington, D.C.; British Columbia; and Hawaii. Shelley praised DHS for its thorough investigation of Homebuilders® and the work the department is putting into it, noting that starting up a program is hard work. “It’s going great,” she said. “There’s a lot of support.”