

ShadowBox training allows CYF staff to “see the world through the eyes of experts”

In an effort to build critical thinking skills for new caseworkers, the Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) recently began piloting the ShadowBox training technique. ShadowBox, an aspect of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s [On the Frontline initiative](#), is a scenario-based training method that allows participants to, in the program designers’ words, “see the world through the eyes of experts without the experts being there.” Trainees are presented with real-life scenarios and required to rank a pre-determined set of actions, often with very limited information to aid their decision-making. Once participants have decided on a course of action, they share their responses with the rest of the training group to examine why certain choices were favorable or unfavorable. Ultimately, the training group’s decisions and rationale are compared to that of child welfare experts from other states.

“While new employees learn policies, procedures, and state regulations, there are often limited opportunities to practice making critical decisions while under pressure,” said Michele Kustra, social work training specialist in CYF. “The situations we encounter in the field are complicated, and Shadowbox provides a way for new staff members to explore their decision-making tendencies while also learning the thought processes of child welfare experts. With this hands-on practice, new staff members will be better prepared to resolve issues as they encounter them.”

The ShadowBox training is currently piloting with five groups: regional office directors, clinical managers, Mon Valley Regional Office (MVRO) supervisors, MVRO caseworker 3s, and a select group of MVRO caseworker 2s. After reviewing the pilot’s results, a team of internal ShadowBox facilitators, executive team members, and ShadowBox LLC staff will determine the best way to incorporate the training into practice. ShadowBox will be integrated in new hire training in early 2017.