

Foster care providers participate in CYF-led Wilkinsburg community experience

“Hidden treasures” was a recurring theme during a Wilkinsburg community experience held on September 16. The event – led by Jace Ransom, community outreach specialist in the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF), and Twanda Clark, Diligent Recruitment Families for Teens training specialist in CYF – is the first community training event held for Auberle, Pressley Ridge, TRAC, and Wesley Spectrum, the four agencies who have been awarded the Teen Family Foster Care contracts. (More information on Families for Teens and the Diligent Recruitment effort is available in the [May 2015 edition](#) of DHS News.) The community experiences are designed to deepen relationships between the four providers and the communities from which many teens in foster care come.

The event began in the Lexington CYF office where Wilkinsburg Mayor John A. Thompson was introduced and honored with the Giving Kids Roots and Wings Award for his commitment to the work of CYF. After a brief overview of the day’s activities, four-person teams were released into Wilkinsburg to participate in a treasure hunt. The teams traveled to four sections of the borough, following witty, rhyming clues that led them to notable restaurants, historic areas, and points of interest.

After two hours, the groups reassembled at the Lexington office to share their experiences over a lunch provided by Soul Food Connection, a Wilkinsburg catering company. Many noted that Wilkinsburg’s residents were very passionate about their community and finding ways to improve it. Additionally, the approachability and friendliness of residents – including Wilkinsburg’s elected officials – was listed as one of the surprising highlights of the experience.

“Too often, people drive down Wilkinsburg’s main arteries and form judgements based on those streets and what they hear on the news. We wanted to give providers the opportunity to spend time in the community and learn about its rich history and caring residents firsthand,” said Jace. “We are thrilled that providers not only found this experience fun and engaging, but also educational. We hope that the attendees will now feel more comfortable recruiting in Wilkinsburg, establishing much needed homes for local teens.”