

## **Educating the community through resource fairs**

Each year, the Department of Human Services (DHS) participates in approximately 100 community and legislative fairs to share information on programs and services with Allegheny County residents.

Community fairs are coordinated by Elaine Plunkett, communications specialist in the Office of Community Relations (OCR). Although most outside event planners know to send their event invitations directly to Elaine, sometimes they will send them directly to the program offices. When program offices receive invitations, they are asked to forward the requests to Elaine, who works to find the most appropriate DHS representative based off the fair's audience. For example, if a fair is focused on assisting individuals who are homeless, a staff member from the LINK may be the best fit. Although DHS representatives are selected based off their expertise in a specific subject area, they must also have a broad knowledge of the Department to answer any additional questions that may arise and an ability to promote current initiatives and campaigns, such as foster care and caseworker recruitment.

Fair representatives are equipped with a "swag bag" of event-appropriate DHS pamphlets, pens and a DHS tablecloth. Additionally, a Director's Action Line (DAL) outreach form is included so follow up may be conducted if a fair attendee has a question or concern.

Shortly after the fair, the DHS representative are asked to complete a post-event survey which includes questions about attendance. Those numbers are part of the LINK's reporting requirements to the PA LINK Regional Coordinator and are directly connected to funding.

"I am grateful to my colleagues who are willing to staff our DHS table at these events. Some of the information fairs are on week nights or on weekends, yet DHS staff can be counted on to step up and volunteer," Elaine said.

To learn more about the information fair process, or to inform Elaine of an upcoming fair, please contact her at [elaine.plunkett@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:elaine.plunkett@alleghenycounty.us).