



DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services



June 2019

Child Welfare Leadership Fellows program returns with innovative solutions to concerns around in-home services

On Tuesday, June 18, five teams of Child Welfare Leadership Fellows gathered at CCAC to present the final phase of their project work focused on the challenge of providing in-home services to families. The 2019 class marked the return of the Fellows program which had taken a one-year hiatus.

The topic of in-home services for families was divided into five focus areas – removals, providers, court-ordered in-home services, recurrent services, and reauthorizations – that the fellows explored in small groups. With the help of a coach, participants reviewed data related to their focus area and came up with innovative solutions to the challenges around in-home services. Some suggestions offered by the Fellows included referring clients to community partners instead of in-home service providers; working more closely with families to match them to the most appropriate provider the first time; piloting an in-home navigator position to decrease removals; creating a single service plan for the family that both providers and Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) caseworkers can use; and encouraging providers to use the FAST assessment to measure a family's success.

"Fellows is a valuable experience for our staff because they're able to work on a real problem facing the agency," said Katie Arvay, child welfare practice analyst in CYF, who oversees the Fellows program. "This year, the Fellows tackled the particularly difficult topic of in-home services and were able to come up with unprecedented findings. They proposed innovative solutions that they will now have the opportunity to work to implement, along with staff throughout the agency."

Although the Fellows program has only been in existence for a few years, ideas generated from the program have been responsible for many changes in the child welfare system, including the establishment of behavioral health specialist positions in each of the five CYF offices; a Private Petition Diversion Initiative that refers a very specific population of youth (12-17 years old without a safety concern) to services they need to address a crisis without CYF involvement; and kinship navigators to assist caseworkers in identifying kin, obtaining clearances and expediting the kinship foster home certification process. Since inception, more than 100 DHS staff members from across DHS program areas have participated as Child Welfare Leadership Fellows.