



DHS News

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Five questions with Angie Steele

Angie is diversity and inclusion officer in the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Angie can be reached at Angela.Steele@AlleghenyCounty.us.

1. What was your path to Allegheny County/DHS?

I began my career at DHS through an internship as a CYF caseworker. I had done the CWEB program, which included an internship as well as employment in child welfare following graduation. I remained a CYF caseworker for 14 years. I held several positions in child welfare and saw many aspects of casework. I also attended the master's-level social work program through the CWEL program during this time. When DHS Data Leadership Fellows was created in 2014, I applied and became a member of the inaugural class. Through that program, I learned how to use data to influence practice. I so fell in love with data that I became a child welfare data analyst with the then-named DARE (now ATP) office. I remained in that position for two years until the opening for diversity and inclusion officer became available. With my casework knowledge, data analysis skills, and background in social justice, I applied for and became the diversity and inclusion officer for the Office of Children, Youth and Families, eventually transferring to the newly formed DHS Office of Equity and Inclusion.

2. Tell us a bit about the work you do.

In my position, I am responsible for identifying disparities in the child welfare system, devising practice and policy changes to reduce disparities, and enacting those changes. I work with staff across child welfare and ATP to take a data-driven approach to this work. We always begin by pulling system data to identify where disparities lie. The work began at an agency level and in conjunction with the DHS Leadership Fellows Class One who identified severe disparities for African-American teen girls. The initial work resulted in practice and policy changes and the implementation of programs, including diversion programs. From that, we saw significant disparity improvements and are now working with regional office-level data to localize our impact. We convene groups of child welfare staff to identify practices that may be contributing to disparities and then propose and enact changes to reduce those disparities.

3. How does your work help to support DHS's mission and goals?

Allegheny County Department of Human Services has identified equity as an essential component of the strategic plan. In DHS we lead with race. When we take into consideration different identities, we know that any disparities seen are magnified when

we also take race into consideration. We know that when we are able to work to alleviate conditions for the most marginalized among us, it betters conditions for all people. We have seen this approach work in child welfare.

4. *What most excites you about your work?*

I am especially excited about my job because I get to work with others who are just as excited about equity as I am. The dedicated staff, system partners and community members who have come together to do this work have created incredible changes and have reduced disparities. It is exciting to be a part of the change that is so needed. I am also very fortunate to be in a position that offers me a constant state of learning – learning about society, about research, about approaches and about myself. I have learned to be a critical lover of the system and know that this work cannot be carried out in a genuine way without constant self-reflection on my biases, my role in perpetuating the system and my role in ending the systemic oppression that has existed since the founding of the country.

5. *What is most important thing DHS staff should know about your role?*

I am a part of a team of equity specialists who are here to support you. We always take a non-judgmental approach and begin where you are. We recognize the importance of building collaborations across DHS to carry out such important work. And we recognize that everyone is coming to the table with diverse experiences and knowledge. We are all available to help guide you toward understanding and action. DHS staff have come to the organization to do their best work and this is an area where we can all improve our services to our community.