



# DHS News

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## **Five questions with Eunice Stover**

Eunice is manager of family preservation in the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF). You can reach her at [Eunice.Stover@AlleghenyCounty.US](mailto:Eunice.Stover@AlleghenyCounty.US).

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

After graduating from Penn State University, I worked in various social service positions while completing courses for my master's degree in social work at the University of Pittsburgh. I started out working for Auberle as a counselor/case manager for their girls' residential program. Most of the residents were DHS/CYF-involved, so I had regular contact with CYF caseworkers. I often spoke at lengths with them regarding their work and wanted to help children and families more directly. This is where my interest in child welfare began. I started at DHS in 1999 as an intake caseworker and then was promoted to a supervisor in 2001. I remained an intake supervisor for 19 years until I started my new role as the manager of family preservation in January 2020. This is a newly created position that emerged out of the 2019 DHS Leadership Fellows Program.

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

I currently oversee a staff complement consisting of our in-home navigators (formally known as our resource coordinators) and the father engagement specialists. These staff are co-located within each of the CYF regional offices. As the family preservation manager, I am responsible for the redesign, management and implementation of what we now think of as in-home services. The goals of our newly established Family Preservation Division are – in the spirit of our child welfare mission to preserve families whenever possible, to protect children from abuse and neglect, and to improve the outcomes for the families and children we serve – to keep children safely at home and reduce placement of children in out-of-home care and reduce re-referrals by strengthening our families. Strategies developed to achieve these goals include improvement of the match between families' assessed needs and the services they are offered (an array of services known to make a difference for families with multifaceted needs). Additionally, CYF seeks to collaboratively monitor the implementation of evidenced-based/evidence-informed programs and community-developed services to ensure we collectively are improving family stability and reducing the risk of child maltreatment and removals.

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

The family preservation work aligns with CYF's mission to protect children from abuse and neglect, to preserve families whenever possible, and to ensure permanency for children. This is illustrated through our in-home navigation and father engagement work. Father engagement is a vital piece of our work. Research tells us that when fathers are involved and supportive, it greatly increases a child's overall sense of well-being and self-confidence. So, as we continue our work, we cannot forget the value of fathers in working toward permanency. In addition, one of the many goals in family preservation is to find services that are culturally informed and driven by family needs. We don't want it to be "just a service," but one that supports the family's goals in becoming self-sustaining and resilient in times of stress or crisis, resulting in lower risk of abuse and neglect and better outcomes for families.

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

Being able to help strengthen and preserve families by allowing them to see their own strengths and resilience.

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

We are evolving, and the utility of the role of in-home navigator and father engagement specialist is expanding! We are "liaisons" between CYF, our providers (contracted and community agencies), and the families we serve. We support CYF regional office staff in many ways, such as engagement, assessments, finding resources for families and linking families to the "right" services for their needs. CYF staff can reach out to the Family Preservation Division at any time to attend staffings; for consultation; and to make referrals and connections for services that will assist in keeping children safe, strengthening their protective capacities and preserving the family.