



# DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County  
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## **CYF works to improve staff well-being**

A culture shift is happening in the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) designed to help staff improve their holistic well-being by making sure they are both trauma-informed (have the understanding that trauma happens to almost all human beings; trauma impacts people in similar and unique ways; and while it may not always be preventable, there are things we can do to help ourselves and others) and trauma-skilled (having a range of coping skills and knowing which ones can help us before, during and after trauma shows up). This work – led by Dr. Lovie Foster, CYF's wellness manager; Ashley McLean, wellness coordinator; and Patrick McKelvey, trauma/staff support consultant – is being done with an emphasis on three areas: prevention, intervention and crisis response.

The prevention efforts are focused on building a culture of wellness in CYF with activities like establishing a [CYF choir](#), sending wellness tips, hosting educational events, and recruiting wellness champions and activity leaders who promote wellness and engagement in CYF offices and teams. Additionally, CYF began hosting monthly Vitality Cafés in June. The Cafés are meaningful gatherings of staff to learn about and discuss their perspectives and experiences around 6 Domains of Vitality: Spiritual, Financial, Physical, Mental/Emotional, Social, and Environmental. Each Café begins with a large group sharing agreement, a mindfulness activity and a brief video about that month's Vitality Domain. Participants then break into small groups for an intimate discussion on the focal Domain before returning to the large group to share key points. Staff have expressed that they find the Cafés to be beneficial and affirming, and they appreciate that the implementation of Cafés shows that CYF values employees as people.

The intervention efforts include programming and workforce initiatives that address trauma exposure. Supervisions are being infused with a trauma-informed lens; CYF is reaching out to support staff dealing with grief and loss both personally and professionally; and the agency is using information gathered by the [2021 class of Child Welfare Leadership Fellows](#) to inform practices around supporting the wellness of older youth.

Additionally, CYF is preparing for two six-hour, staff-wide trainings: Trauma-informed Child Welfare and Components for Enhancing Clinician Engagement and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT), which is a training that helps staff move beyond self-awareness to social emotional learning and self-management. Supervisors get a more in-depth experience with an additional 4-hour training that equips them with the competencies to support caseworkers. Supervisors, clinical managers, and executive leaders will also participate in 10-month-long “affinity groups” with their peers and the CE-CERT training team.

Finally, the crisis response efforts are designed to address ongoing stressors and trauma that may result from critical incidents and less common, but still potentially traumatic, events. CYF is establishing a 30-person Crisis Intervention Stress Management (CISM) Team to offer more staff the opportunity to check in or debrief to help at all levels of need from prevention and intervention around chronic stress, to critical incidents such as Act 33s (child deaths or near fatalities), threats, or assaults. Additionally, CYF has a Staff Support Workgroup, Trauma Training Implementation Team, and other Wellness Workgroups comprised of individuals with a diverse array of trauma expertise and a passion for supporting staff. These groups are developing a glossary of trauma-related terms to provide staff with appropriate terminology and reduce the use of derogatory, stigmatizing language; planning wellness activities, events, and trauma training, and working to improve staff referrals to appropriate resources by gathering information on diverse resources available in Allegheny County and elsewhere. Whether it is prevention-, intervention- or crisis response-focused, the goal of this wellness work is to positively impact staff morale; foster healthy interactions and build trust; address chronic stress through self-awareness, self-care, and self-management; and raise awareness of ways systems change can reduce trauma responses/symptoms and potentially traumatic experiences.

“Caseworkers are so busy taking care of others, that they don’t always take care of themselves, which ends up affecting their lives, their families, and ultimately leads to burnout and turnover,” said Lovie. “By making sure our workers are knowledgeable about trauma and have skills for coping and self-care, we hope that they will learn it is OK to reach out when they need help instead of pushing it down. We all have to be intentional about taking care of ourselves first. These efforts will then improve the way we take care of the families we serve. We want a holistic impact.”

To learn more about these efforts, contact Lovie at [lovie.foster@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:lovie.foster@alleghenycounty.us) or Ashley at [ashley.mclean@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:ashley.mclean@alleghenycounty.us).