



DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services



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Intimate Partner Violence specialists support staff, families

In 2019, DHS's Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) [was selected as a research and capacity building site](#) by Quality Improvement Center on Domestic Violence in Child Welfare (QIC-DVCW). This work has allowed CYF to enhance supports that help staff assess, engage and plan with families who are experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV). One of those enhancements is the addition of more IPV specialists – Women's Center and Shelter staff members who are available as supports for CYF staff.

While CYF first began working with an IPV specialist in 2003, CYF had expanded to three IPV specialists and a supervisor/program manager by 2019. Through funding from the QIC, CYF hired an additional person in 2019. This year, CYF has agreed to not only continue to pay for that position, but also to add a fifth position.

The specialists offer psychoeducation, emotional support, and resource sharing for families, and support CYF staff with coaching and consultation related to IPV. Specialists meet with caseworkers in the QIC-DVCW intervention sites (the East and Central Regional Offices) every other month for presentations, discussions and case consultation. In the months that specialists are not meeting with caseworkers, they meet with supervisors to offer similar support. Some of the educational topics covered in these meetings have included gaslighting, working with the person using violence, accountability, language around IPV, and the intersection of mental health and IPV. Beyond helping staff with their caseloads, IPV specialists are available to help and offer resources directly to CYF staff who are experiencing intimate partner violence in their personal lives.

"The IPV specialists have become an integral part of our work, especially when it comes to planning," said Kaitlyn Leo, CYF casework supervisor in the Central Regional Office. "We're seeing that consultation and support can happen right in the moment, which means that parents are giving the same information to both the IPV specialist and CYF staff. This makes things easier on the families, streamlines the process, and helps us to make sure we are proactive and providing the best support for the families on our caseload."

While DHS CYF work with the IPV specialists will continue, the role as a QIC-DVCW research and capacity building site wraps up in September 2021. CYF and the Office of

Community Services (OCS), with key stakeholders including the 5th Judicial District and community partners, are currently evaluating benefits from this work across and within systems. At the conclusion of 2021, DHS and partners look forward to reconvening to review the findings prepared and presented by the QIC to learn where collaborative efforts related to IPV can be advanced.