



Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Erin Dalton, Director



Office of
Equity and
Engagement

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Administration

Jessica Ruffin
DHS DEPUTY DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF EQUITY AND ENGAGEMENT

General Questions:
DHS-OEE@alleghenycounty.us

Equity and Inclusion questions
and requests:
DHS-Equity@alleghenycounty.us

Inquiries from the media:
412-350-3439 or 412-350-6897

Director's Action Line (DAL):
1-800-862-6783 or
DAL@AlleghenyCounty.US

Walk-ins are welcome Monday
through Friday from 8:00 am
to 4:30 pm.

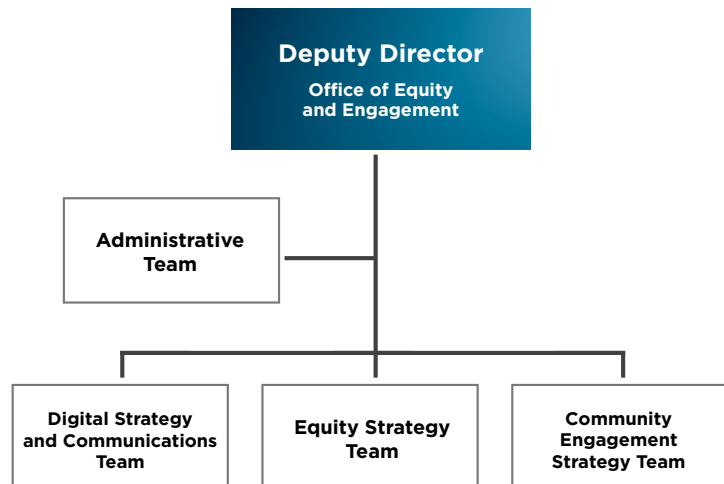
Event and Donations Team:
412-350-3428

Resource Fairs:
DHSInformationFairs@alleghenycounty.us

Background

The Office of Equity and Engagement (OEE) was created in 2021 by merging the Office of Community Relations (OCR) and the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI). OEE continues to serve the functions of both offices while expanding to include a strong focus on Community Engagement. The synergy created by merging and extending the reach of these offices helps to ensure that all communication, outreach and engagement occurs within the context of DHS's values of equity, inclusion, diversity and transparency.

Under the direction of Deputy Director Jessica Ruffin, OEE is structured within three units: *Digital Strategy and Communications*, *Equity and Inclusion*, and *Community Engagement*. These units, while discreet, interconnect to ensure an integrated response to communication and engagement needs.



The Digital Strategy and Communications Unit is responsible for ensuring that DHS communicates and interfaces with all internal and external stakeholders (e.g., DHS staff, clients, DHS-contracted service providers, local and national media, elected officials, advocates, faith-based organizations, corporate and small businesses, local and national funders, other human and social service agencies, and the general public).

This is accomplished through a variety of communication strategies and platforms, including web development, design, electronic and social media, publications (e.g., newsletter, brochures and parents' handbook), video (<https://vimeo.com/acdhs>) and traditional media. Local print, radio and television media outlets are alerted through news releases and requests for coverage about current and upcoming DHS stories of interest.

DHS maintains Facebook (www.facebook.com/acdhs), Twitter (www.twitter.com/acdhs), Neighborland and LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/alleghey-county-department-of-human-services>) pages to facilitate two-way communication with our stakeholders who use social media. NextDoor is utilized as an additional means of two-way communication with the communities DHS serves.

Communication staff also respond to media inquiries generated by local and national news stories that are tied to human services in general or DHS specifically, and provide training to DHS staff who will be engaging with the media.

The DHS website, <http://www.allegheycounty.us/human-services/index.aspx>, is maintained by the DHS (OEE) webmaster, as are the DHS Intranet and various other program-/project-specific websites.

The Equity and Inclusion Unit envisions a DHS where race no longer predicts one's success because all service are of high quality – which means doing the right thing for the right client, at the right time, in the right way to achieve the best possible results. This is accomplished through planning and support of a range of strategies designed to ensure that all of DHS's services and programs are culturally responsive and accessible to all Allegheny County residents.

Another function of the unit is support for special populations (e.g., LGBTQIA+, Immigrants & Internationals). This support ranges from translation services to facilitation of the Immigrants & Internationals Advisory Group.

The Director's Action Line (DAL) offers access for county residents who have questions and/or concerns. Professional, responsive staff answer questions, investigate concerns and inform consumers of the results. They assist directly when possible and explain procedures for getting additional help if necessary. The content and quantity of requests for assistance made to the Director's Action Line are also used to generate data for statistical analysis to help evaluate policies, procedures, practices and employee response.

The Community Engagement Unit

Recognizing that in order to create programming and provide services that are responsive to community needs and accessible, we have to do so in partnership with the community, the Community Engagement Unit works to ensure that community voice and input is present in all of DHS's work. The unit will accomplish that charge by providing support to DHS in managing advisory councils, hosting listening sessions and gathering community feedback.

The community outreach team represents DHS in the community through information fairs and other events. The team also educates the public about human service-related issues through its support of local and national awareness campaigns. Topics have included ensuring safe sleep for infants, leaving children safely home alone, choosing a child's caregiver(s) with care, and the developmental importance of speaking directly to babies and infants.

In addition, the team plans and executes several annual events that combine awareness-building with recognition and/or donation acquisition:

- The DHS Holiday Project provides gifts for abused and neglected children and youth whose families are served by the DHS Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) through donations from local corporations, faith-based organizations, school groups and the general public
- Project Prom, in partnership with the National Council of Jewish Women, provides a selection of donated new and gently used formal attire and accessories to high school students whose families receive services through DHS.
- The Allegheny County Music Festival supports a fund that supplements traditional funding streams to provide otherwise unattainable life-enriching items and opportunities for children receiving services through DHS.
- Candidates Comedy Night is an additional fundraiser for the Allegheny County Music Festival Fund that features local politicians and candidates for federal, state and local political offices taking the stage to perform comedy, music and other talents for the gathered contributors.
- A Back-to-School Drive in which backpacks and school supplies are collected during the summer and distributed to children in need.

DHS's KEYS (Knowledge to Empower Youth to Success) Service Corp, an AmeriCorp program since 1995, also resides within the Community Engagement Unit. KEYS Service Corps members serve at-risk youth in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County by providing safe places with structured activities, assisting with homework and classwork, and implementing service projects.

Members serve full time or less than full time at one of our partnering sites while receiving training and support from KEYS staff before and during their term-of-service. Members are placed with a variety of schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations.