



Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation

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Our Mission *The Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation is dedicated to improving the emotional health and well-being of children living in Allegheny County by providing grants and collaborating with public and private organizations to implement innovative policies, practices and programs.*

DHS Studies Homelessness in Allegheny County from Client Perspective

In January 2015, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services released the results of the research report, *Homeless in Allegheny County: The Client Experience*. This comprehensive report reveals its findings and recommendations on how to lower the number of people experiencing homelessness and how service providers should properly interact with them.

The homelessness service system in Allegheny County comprises more than 120 programs operated by human service organizations, medical and behavioral health providers and government agencies. The county's homelessness system includes an estimated 5,000 individuals and families.

According to the report, 3,056 Allegheny County individuals and 862 families (representing 2,440 individuals) were served in 2013 by three types of programs:

- **PREVENTION PROGRAMS** include rental assistance.
- **EMERGENCY SHELTER SERVICES** provide temporary housing and support for homeless individuals or families in immediate need of a place to stay. Allegheny County contains 18 emergency shelters.
- **HOUSING SERVICES** include:
 - **57 transitional housing programs** provide temporary (maximum of two years) housing combined with supportive services to assist the family in gaining self-sufficiency.
 - **43 permanent supportive housing providers** combine housing with intensive services with no limit on the length of stay.
 - **3 rapid re-housing programs** help homeless families and individuals in crisis.
 - **4 safe havens** provide shelter for chronically homeless single individuals.

continued



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DHS Studies Homelessness CONTINUED

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services conducted extensive interviews to document the experience of the county's homeless community.

Six common themes and issues emerged:

- The system can be **difficult for clients to navigate and understand**, and various program staff members were not always aware of the full range of service options.
- **Regulatory and program criteria can create barriers** to service, such as:
 - Some family shelters refuse boys over age 14, forcing families to split up;
 - Some programs do not accommodate large families;
 - Some programs required timely background checks and interview processes for program enrollment.
- Regulatory and program criteria can create barriers to success due to **inadequate access to transportation and regulatory restrictions on length of stay**.
- **Many clients do not feel respected or well-supported**, citing that some staff used judgmental and demeaning language towards the clients.
- **Clients expressed fear about their shelters**, leading them to double-up (couch-surf), which can be more unsafe to both the parents and children since living in crowded and stressful situations may put children at a greater risk of abuse.
- Clients face numerous **barriers to finding appropriate, affordable housing** due to:
 - Bad credit and unpaid utility/housing bills;
 - Cost of applications and credit check;
 - Criminal records.

The report also found that on a system-wide level, the issues are broader than experiences from the individual level and require a more systematic approach. In terms of the welfare of children experiencing homelessness, the report's findings cited that children face unique challenges during homelessness. Examples of such challenges include the fact that children's needs are often considered secondary to the immediate crisis of homelessness and children experiencing homelessness are more likely to have developmental delays, behavioral problems and learning disabilities.

In order to create a compassionate and well-informed homeless provider system, Allegheny County will add a standardized assessment to its coordinated intake process beginning in Fiscal Year 2015/16 and implement the best practices system-wide. These practices will include increasing the speed in which clients can move into their new housing and introducing staff training on various situations clients face and the best ways to address their issues.

The Homeless in Allegheny County: The Client Experience report has provided great insight to the problems facing the community of people experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County.



Visit www.alleghenycounty.us.dhs in the *Research and Reports (Basic Needs)* section to read the entire report.

The report was prepared by Abigail Horn, Evelyn Whitehill and Michael Yonas, DrPH.

Homelessness is...

A child is considered homeless if he or she is living in one of the following situations:

- Doubled-up (i.e. sharing the housing of other persons due to economic hardship, loss of housing or other reasons, such as domestic abuse);
- Hotel/motel;
- Shelter (includes shelters, transitional housing and/or awaiting foster care);
- Unsheltered (cars, parks, campgrounds, temporary trailers including FEMA trailers, substandard housing or abandoned buildings).



Collaborative Training Series to Support Homeless Providers

Our new Area of Emphasis focuses on serving children who are experiencing homelessness.

As we begin our work in helping to mitigate the impact of homelessness on families with young children, the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation is partnering with Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Pittsburgh Mercy Health System and the Office of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh to create a training series for care providers working in shelters.

Our working group refers to this model as “training circles.” The goals are simple: to create high-quality, low-cost, sustainable training programs by tapping into the expertise

within the many shelters in the county. Many of these content experts will train their colleagues. Topics for the five-module interactive training series were designed with input from numerous service providers to equip staff with the skills to be supportive caregivers and administrators in a safe environment.



The topics include:

- **Serving Families in Crisis**, which teaches such skills as gathering information, creating rapport and de-escalating agitated individuals;
- **An Introduction to Early Childhood Development**, which provides an overview of early childhood development from birth to age 6 and how to best support the emotional and physical milestones in this period of time;
- **Cultural Competence** explores culture, race, ethnicity and class and promotes the understanding and appreciation of diversity;
- **Identification, Intervention and Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence** examines all types of abusive behavior and how to handle these situations, including intervention strategies for keeping families safe;
- **Trauma Informed Care and Compassion Fatigue** explores the emotional responses to trauma, the symptoms of compassion fatigue and how to manage it.

Workshops began in April and continue through August and are free and open to all shelter staff employees.

For more information or to register, please call 412.383.4447



Kudos to...

Rev. Dr. Ronald Peters, former President of the PCGF Board of Trustees and founding director of the Metro-Urban Institute, who recently was recognized by the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Metro-Urban Institute with the Legacy Award for pioneering ministry and distinguished services. MUI was established in 1991 to help churches address growing concerns related to urban living. Congratulations, Ron!

Chip Burke, who received the Excellence in Mentoring Award from The National Mentoring Partnership in recognition of his passion and dedication to mentoring. Well done, Chip!

Maurita Bryant, Assistant Chief of Investigations, Pittsburgh Police and PCGF Board Member, **Kim Berkeley Clark**, Judge Family Division and PCGF community partner, and **Anna Hollis**, Executive Director, Amachi Pittsburgh and PCGF community partner, who were inducted into the PNC Legacy Project for their contributions in breaking barriers, challenging convention and bettering our community.

Aja Thorpe, who has been helping out in the Foundation office on a part-time basis since 2013. She is graduating from Sewickley Academy in June and will attend Yale University this fall. Congratulations, Aja!

Remembering Dr. Coatsworth



PCGF honors the legacy of **Dr. Kathy Hamm Coatsworth**, a social worker and teacher at the Child Guidance Center, who passed away on January 20, 2015 after a sudden illness.

In 1979, Dr. Coatsworth established the Creative Living Center, a private practice to help people resolve everyday problems. Throughout her life, she also taught at various area universities.

In celebration of Dr. Coatsworth's life, the Tuesday PWT Tennis Group made a donation to the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation. We extend our sincerest condolences to Dr. Coatsworth's family and friends, and we offer thanks to the tennis group for this generous donation.