

DHS in Motion

Issue #2, January 2001

A Monthly Message from the Commissioner

Hello DHS colleagues!

I am happy to introduce our second edition of "DHS in Motion", a monthly message that hopes to accomplish the following:

- Establish dialogues with staff around current work and agency priorities
- Highlight our agency's accomplishments
- Discuss changes taking place at DHS

I encourage you to give me feedback on the ideas, plans, and highlights that I share with you here. I look forward to hearing from you!

Developing our 21st Century Customer-oriented Approach

As you may remember from the last issue of DHS In Motion, one of the "DHS vision goals" that I shared was to "transform DHS into a customer friendly and accessible resource center for families." In this second issue, I would like to share how this vision is shaping up.

During the past ten years, new communication technologies have truly changed the way we all get our information. By pressing a button, touching a screen, or typing a key word, we can now access information about practically anything that is taking place in any part of the world!

Philadelphia is working hard to catch up with the technology revolution and engage with its citizens in multiple ways. Given the size, complexity, and delicate mission of DHS, our goal is to be ahead of the information technology curve. This will enable us to enhance the way we share information amongst ourselves, with our constituents, and how we respond to some of the needs of children and families in our city.

We are currently in the process of building communication mechanisms that will enable our staff, clients, and public at large to access needed information about DHS services, provider networks, and other community-based resources.

DHS Switchboard

We are starting from the ground up by establishing something very simple, but greatly needed: a DHS switchboard. Currently, DHS does not have a main number except for the hotline. Roughly, about a third of the calls coming into the hotline are simple information requests and about 15% of the calls received by City Hall (approximately 900 per week!) are for DHS. People cannot reach us directly unless they know our extension or call the City Hall switchboard. A main number with a switchboard that can transfer calls to the appropriate person or department is a straightforward, customer-oriented "port of entry".

The DHS switchboard will help our agency in four fundamental ways. It will:

- reduce the number of misrouted calls to the hotline, specific departments, and individual staff members;*
- provide better customer service by sending callers to the appropriate department or person and reducing "bouncing calls" or callers getting voice mail messages instead of a live person;*



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- provide access to information on in-house and external community resources to staff, clients, and other families who are not involved with our system;*
- reduce the time spent in "complaint investigation and feedback" by many of our staff members by routing these calls to an "ombudsteam" that will be responsible for investigating and providing the feedback; AND*

- create more direct and seamless ways for us to communicate with each other and for clients and families to talk to us and access our information*

The chart below illustrates how the switchboard would operate and interact with the hotline.

A work-group that includes communications, hotline, information and referral, client reception, triage, personnel, staff development, and logistics has been working hard to move this forward. As with any major changes, this is a flexible concept. Since one of the main beneficiaries of a general switchboard will be our staff, we will welcome input and feedback as the process moves along.

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Hello (continued)

"Guide To Services"

The "Guide to Services" will be more than a brochure. It will be an informational tool for our staff, providers, city partners, clients, and public in general. It will describe:

- what we do - our mission and responsibilities,
- who does what - what are the functions of the different divisions and departments and who is the contact person,
- specific programs and services - resources available to DHS clients and those available to families and children in general,
- links to community-based resources - where to look for community programs, and
- frequently asked question and an alphabetized telephone directory of all our staff.

DHS Internal and External Websites

Internal Website or INTRANET

The DHS Intranet site will be an online, multi-purpose toolbox for DHS staff that will simplify and make easier our employees' access to vital child welfare, juvenile justice, and aging information and resources. The DHS Intranet site will also be used to simplify some basic departmental functions and needs, such as the reservation of cars, the use of electronic city maps to find specific addresses, the electronic submission and signature of forms, and access to personnel and human resources information. The DHS INTRANET will create two-way and multiple ways to communicate between ourselves in order to foster a team-oriented and "seamless" system of supports for children and families engaged with the Department.

DHS World Wide Web Site or INTERNET

The DHS Internet Site will be an online, multi-function family and children's resource center for DHS clients, citywide partners, and Philadelphia residents at large. Its interactive capabilities will allow partners and the public to provide ongoing feedback about services, programs, initiatives and other matters related to the health and well being of children and families in our city. Some functions of the DHS INTERNET site will be to:

- promote DHS mission and services to clients
- promote DHS mission and services open to the public
- publish DHS accomplishments
- provide access to user-friendly Family and Children's Resource Guide
- provide access to neighborhood based resources
- communicate with other systems in the city and state (i.e. courts, behavioral health)
- share information among work groups and committees that involve external members
- share information on policy changes, notices with the public
- simple Q & A with public on child and family wellbeing issues ■

November Adoption Month Highlights

During the month of November, DHS was able to participate in multiple efforts to inform the public about the need for more adoptive families in Philadelphia. As you may know:

- DHS has dramatically increased the number of children in permanent, adoptive homes by 200%. In 1995, 212 adoptions were finalized, compared to this year, where 650 adoptions were finalized.
- Today, there are approximately 300 children who still need a permanent, adoptive home. We need to continue working very hard to ensure that older children and children with special medical or behavioral needs find a permanent family.

As part of an overall "strategy-in-progress" to educate the public about adoption and to recruit more adoptive families, the following things were accomplished in November and early December:

- Co-sponsorship of Adoption Sabbath - Media surrounding this event recognized the Department's work around adoption.

- Community Voices, Sunday November 19, Sunday, November 26 - Letters illustrated the diversity of adoptive families, challenges, and reward.

- Editorials in The Inquirer and Citypaper

- Channel 6 "Children First" - Channel 6



Joanne and Eugene Wingfield have adopted 6 children - (Tiesha, Nyasha, Syiesha, Arlene, Ava, and James)- and won last year's SWAN award for "Adoptive Family of the Year".

conducted a four-part series on adoptions during the month of November, highlighting the rewards of adopting older and special needs children.

- The Inquirer published a feature story on the need to find adoptive homes for children in our city

Hard work remains ahead of all of us. It will continue to be a challenge to find nurturing families and homes for children in our care who are ready to be adopted, particularly older children and those with special medical or behavioral needs. DHS will be taking a to take leadership in developing a pro-active strategy to recruit more adoptive families. Such a strategy will be designed to complement our other multiple advocacy efforts with the courts, child and parent advocates, and other needed partners in the process of adoption. It's an exciting time for our agency as it takes the lead in developing collaborative strategies in this arena!

Happy New Year

Just a short note to THANK all our DHS employees and partners for your hard work and commitment to the safety and permanency of children and families in the city of Philadelphia during the past year.

I hope you had a time of rest, renewal, and sharing during the holidays and hope that the New Year will bring you peace, joy, and more energy to continue working together to strengthen families in our beautiful city!

Thank you again.

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