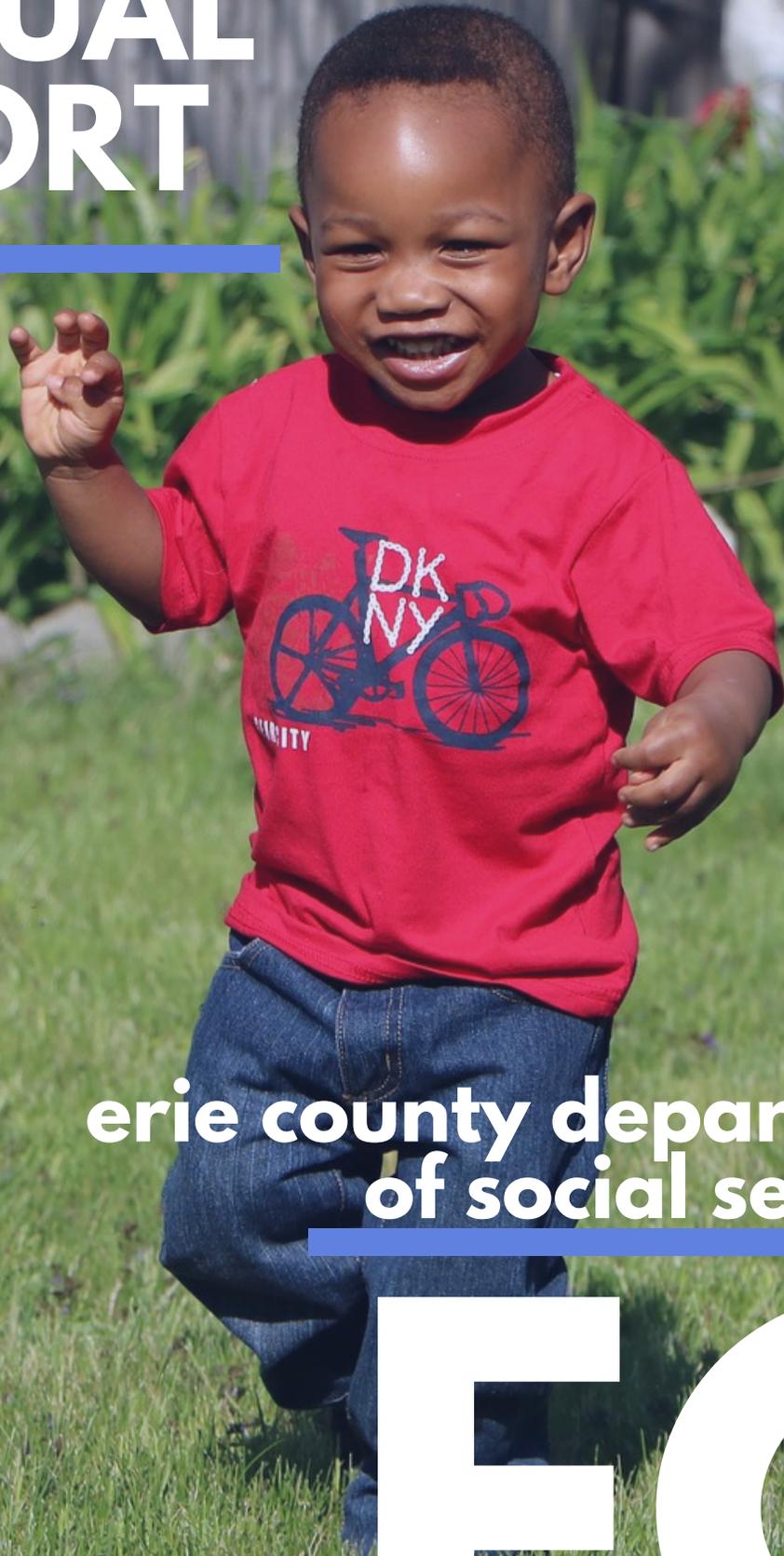


2018 ANNUAL REPORT



erie county department
of social services

ECS

COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE

It has been an honor to serve as your Commissioner of Erie County Department of Social Services since April 2018. I have the distinct privilege to work with dynamic leadership teams, committed community partners, and hardworking and dedicated staff. The goal we share is to improve outcomes for all members of our community that we serve.

The annual report takes a look back at the progress of the last year and the advancement of our strategic priorities.

Workforce Development:

We continue to invest in our employees:

1. We continue to be committed to training 1,600 members of our staff in **Solution Focused Trauma Informed Care**;
2. Our Human Resource Division labeled 2018 the **Year of the Supervisor** and focused our training on supporting and enhancing the leadership skills of our managers; and
3. The **Annual Health and Wellness Conference** was held to support staff in a holistic manner.

Customer Service:

In response to the needs of the community, we initiated the following:

1. **Extended hours** on Thursday evenings at our Erie County Works Center;
2. Implemented the use of **video conferencing for required face-to-face** interviews to serve clients residing in substance abuse treatment centers to support their efforts in recovery;
3. **Secured a mobile van** to travel throughout the entire County and provide services in underserved parts of our community;
4. **Expanded Code Blue Services** (winter homeless outreach) to the rural parts of the county;
5. **Enhanced our Summer Youth Employment Program** to include financial literacy, science, technology, engineering and math;
6. **Initiated Community Conversations with the Commissioner.** This is an opportunity to share with the community department updates and solicit feedback from the community.

Safe and High Quality Environment:

1. Completed renovations in our Secure Youth Facility, remodeled the Legal Department, and relocated the Home Energy Assistance Program and Emergency Services Division.
2. Initiated the relocation of the Child Welfare components of the Family Wellness Division.

The Department is committed to developing broad community partnerships, strengthening intergovernmental relationships, engaging in continuous quality improvement, enhancing the skills and knowledge of our staff, and providing the best possible service to individuals, children, and families. We are proud of our 2018 accomplishments and look forward to even greater achievements in 2019.



**In Service,
Marie A. Cannon, MSW**

2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

CPS received more than 13,000 reports of child abuse or neglect in 2018. Investigations into these reports led to 600 children being removed from unsafe situations and placed into care. Of those children, 395 were placed with relatives or a close family friend, and our priority for these children is to maintain contact with their families and their community.

Child protective staff continues to be trained and educated solution-focused trauma informed care. In addition, staff are encouraged to implement self-care techniques to address the vicarious trauma inherent in Child Welfare work. In March 2018, tablets were deployed to all CPS staff as a tool to access necessary information while in the field. The software allows for real-time communication with supervisors and CPS administration.

We continue to support and promote community collaboration by co-locating our staff within the community and allowing community programs to co-locate within CPS. Workers from three CPS teams are liaisons with 28 school districts within Erie County, spending time two days per week in various schools. This partnership has helped build a relationship with the schools, their children,

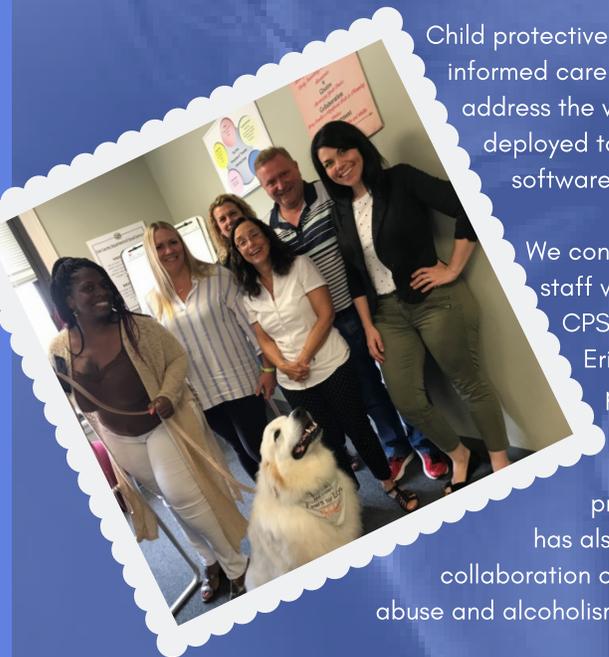
families and the community. Through conversations and community presentations, CPS is able to share what it can do to support families in crisis. It has also helped to open the lines of communication and create a sense of collaboration on issues as diverse as abuse and neglect, poverty, mental health, substance abuse and alcoholism, and developmental delays.

CPS Team Leader Maria Rodriguez, who oversees one of the co-located CPS units, describes the initiative as having improved overall response time for children with injuries. Caseworkers are often on location at schools when children are found to have injuries. Caseworkers are then available to interview children as soon as a report is received. The school co-location initiative allows CPS staff to better communicate with and educate school officials and the community about CPS.

In 2018 our workers at the school districts consulted with school officials about 2,562 children. Of those consults, only 414 families required a report to be made and investigated. In the other instances our staff were able to support the family with connections to extended family, the community or Social Service programs and avoid a formal entrance to the Child Welfare system.

2018 saw two Haven House Domestic Violence (DV) advocates located within our programs to promptly safety plan with victims of family violence to keep victims and their children safe. Victims are linked with DV shelters and advocacy with the Court and other systems when necessary, and receive service planning and linkages to counseling programs. In 2018 there were 714 referrals made by caseworkers to these two advocates. Per the advocates, these referrals have led to many successful interventions and this partnership helped to end the cycle of violence for those affected.

A successful intervention by our Domestic Violence advocates happened to a client named Suzanne. Suzanne was a 23-year-old woman with an 8-month-old baby living with her boyfriend and the child at an area homeless shelter. CPS



2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

received a report that Suzanne had been beaten severely by her abuser in the presence of the 8-month-old child. She disclosed to the CPS worker upon intake severe emotional, financial, and sexual abuse by her boyfriend. Suzanne had petitioned and received orders of protection through Town Courts and Family Court. Suzanne previously had difficulty making it to court appearances and many of the DV charges against her boyfriend were eventually dropped. Her case was referred to a Domestic Violence advocate named Melinda.

Working with her DV advocate, Suzanne and her baby were linked to services at Haven House. They remained at Haven House for three months and were connected with Social Service programs to sustain them financially while coordinating physical and mental health programs for mom and baby. Melinda advocated for Suzanne through the District Attorney's office for all the pending cases and petitions against her abuser to be brought before the Integrated Domestic Violence Court to be heard by one Judge. Working in collaboration with the CPS worker, Melinda successfully advocated for Suzanne to obtain full custody of her child and to relocate closer to family and friends able to support her. Suzanne has since enrolled in college, seeking a degree in Social Work with the hope of eventually working with DV victims and their families.



In recent years, CPS has established two CPS investigative units specializing in DV cases. These teams are now working with and training with DV programs, law enforcement, the Courts, and the District Attorney's office to share information and end the cycle of violence. We have partnered with the DV High Risk team which brings together multi-disciplinary agencies quarterly to discuss cases and how to better keep individuals safe.

We continue to develop and work with the Courts and the refugee community to educate immigrant families about the resources available to them as they transition into their new community while dealing with the trauma faced before crossing our borders. We want to be better able to educate the public and our staff on cultural differences and expectations. We continue to work with community agencies and the refugee community to build resources to support families through a CPS unit established solely to work with refugee families involved with Child Welfare. In 2018 we received a grant to begin the Refugee/Immigrant Community Health Worker Initiative. This initiative was developed to bridge the gap between refugee/immigrant families and CPS. The Community Health Worker (CHW) is a specially trained individual who assists CPS workers in understanding cultural practices and norms while providing support to families who need help understanding the laws that govern CPS interventions. CHWs assist in making linkages for families to various entities that do not require further involvement with Child Welfare for delivery. As we move into 2019, we hope to co-locate caseworkers within the refugee resettlement agencies to learn more about this diverse population and how to best support them in making a successful transition into our community.

2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

Our two fatality and serious injury units continue to do exceptional work and receive accolades from our multi-disciplinary partners within the community and the New York State Office of Child and Family Services. In association with these partners and through OCFS, we were able to get our multi-disciplinary team certified over this past year by OCFS which will allow us to further expand through additional funding we will qualify for training and resources for staff going forward.

CHILDRENS SERVICES

As of November 30, 2018, the Children's Services division provided services to 1,585 families. This figure includes 908 families receiving preventive services, the purpose of which is to allow vulnerable families to safely maintain custody of their children. When it is not possible for children to safely remain in their homes, they must be placed with relatives or in foster homes. As of November 30, 2018, the Children's Services division had 273 cases with children in kinship care and 404 cases with children in foster care (either with relative or non-relative foster parents).

In 2018, the Children's Services division placed a heavy emphasis on strengthening families so that Children's Services involvement in their lives was no longer necessary. A second goal was moving children who could not be safely returned to their parents to permanent custody arrangements with relatives, adoption, or independent living arrangements. As a result of this focus on achieving permanency for children, the Children's Services division reduced the number of families receiving services by 20.7% from November 2017.

An example of the essential work done by Children's Services involves the case of three children ages 16, 12, and 6 months. On a Friday afternoon in August 2018, Children's Services was granted custody of the children. Reports indicated that the family was camping at Letchworth State Park. New York State Troopers and New York State Park Police were contacted to assist in locating the family. Police were unable to locate the family at any New York State park. After trying to engage family members to no avail, the case was turned over to After Hours Child Protective Services (CPS), who diligently but unsuccessfully sought the children throughout the weekend. On Sunday, the Children's Services Caseworker received a Facebook message from the 16-year-old child, stating that she was scared and wanted the Caseworker to come pick her up. The child had only limited information as to her location. Several hours later, the Caseworker received additional information regarding the children's location. She drove to Wyoming County with her After Hours CPS counterpart to pick the children up and take them to safety. This case speaks to the trust that the child had in her Caseworker. Because of the Caseworker's engagement skills and the relationship she had built with the child, the child trusted her enough to reach out to her when she felt unsafe.

ADOPTION & SPECIALIZED SERVICES

Approximately 162 adoptions were finalized by the Erie County Adoption Units, a number which represents 22 more adoptions than were finalized in the previous year. The Adoption Units work hard to keep siblings together in adoptive homes. As of November 30, 2018, 8 sibling groups of three and 1 sibling group of four were adopted. In December, there are 2 more sibling groups of three scheduled to be finalized.

The adoption units provided services to 396 children. Only four youth were transferred to Erie County Independent Living

2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

(IL) with goal changes. One youth was discharged to the permanent custody of his grandmother in Florida. Seven children are supervised in Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) placements and three are placed in other states through the ICPC process. Three found permanency with family members through Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP). One child aged out of care.

Erie County's Adoption Units have been taking steps to find permanent families for the children in our care who are currently without a permanent resource. They are using innovative programs to help serve the children in our Guardianship and Custody programs. The adoption units are working with OCFS and the Casey Foundation to improve outcomes for children who are legally freed for adoption. They have increased their efforts to find relative resources for children and to help children obtain permanency through KinGAP arrangements.

The Adoption Units have increased their use of Permanency Round Tables (PRT) in 2018. With the assistance of OCFS, Erie County Adoption Units are using the PRT process to take an in-depth look at the child's history, relatives, and community resources to find a permanent family for the child. The Adoption Units participated in the Rapid Permanency Reviews (RPR) in 2017; in doing so, a more efficient tool was developed to target and track "Bright Spots" and "Barriers" to our children achieving permanency in a timely manner. With the assistance of the Casey Foundation, OCFS and Erie County staff can now work on addressing the barriers and sharing the identified bright spots to children achieving permanency.

Since the passage of the Families First Prevention Services Act, all Departments of Social Services have been working to come into compliance with the bill. Expectations include the increase in placements of children with relatives and other people with whom the children have a strong connection. Increasing the certification of these relatives and those who have a strong connection to the child while continuing to expand our recruitment of additional foster homes is a priority of the division.

HOMEFINDING

Homefinding has been instrumental in helping to locate and certify relatives and fictive kin to care for children entering foster care. To meet the growing need for foster care certification, the Erie County Homefinding Unit has increased the number of GPSII/MAPP and Deciding Together trainings. Changes to recruitment and retention of foster homes continue so that Erie County Homefinding maintains a current read on community wants, needs, and availability. Collaboration with community stakeholders has proven successful as Erie County Homefinding looks to provide education and information about child welfare to our immigrant and refugee communities.

In 2018, Homefinding received 905 referrals to locate a foster home for child(ren) coming in to care. A total of 770 children were placed in foster homes through the work of Homefinding. The following are statistics for each of the types of cases Erie County Homefinding manages, the work being done with regard to recruitment and retention of foster homes, and how Erie County Homefinding is working in partnership with community stakeholders.

Preliminaries are inquiries from persons throughout Erie County who are interested in becoming certified foster parents through Erie County Homefinding. The number of assigned cases involving this group totaled 32 for 2018. This number is

2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

almost unchanged from 2017. Expedites are cases in which Erie County attempts to locate family resources or family connections with a child coming into care to provide foster care. In 2018, 70 such expedited cases have been assigned. Expedites continue to be a larger segment of cases than preliminaries. This is fortunate in that it means more family and persons connected with a child can care for that child and keep her/him connected with the social environment to which he/she is accustomed. Erie County Homefinding completes adoption home studies for both its own foster homes as well as for agency foster homes where the agency is not an adoption agency. In 2018, there were 59 adoption home studies completed. National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE)/ Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) – Erie County Homefinding is the central office for coordinating ICPC referrals. This office has met the training requirements to manage in-coming and out-going ICPC requests through the NEICE system. Erie County Homefinding managed 26 ICPC cases in 2018.

Out-Of-Town (OTI) Inquiries are when other New York State County offices request that Erie County assist with a home study or home assessment. Erie County Homefinding assisted with 7 OTI's in 2018. Transfers happen when foster families move from one foster care agency to another. For this to occur, best practice is to hold a transfer conference between the foster parent, their current foster care agency, and Erie County Homefinding. In 2018, there were 8 foster homes that transferred to Erie County Homefinding. To meet the need of certifying family, kin, and other interested parties as foster parents, Erie County Homefinding increased the number of GPSII/MAPP and Deciding Together certification trainings offered in 2018. There have been 5 GPSII/MAPP trainings and 12 Deciding Together trainings.

Erie County Homefinding is poised and ready to begin the use of the Connections Placement Module. Foster home characteristics have been entered in Connections and will be used to match foster homes to characteristics noted for a child entering care.

Recruitment efforts continue to evolve as the community's perception of fostering changes. Erie County Homefinding utilizes various forms of recruiting to bring the message of fostering to the community. Erie County Homefinding now has a Facebook page that provides a social platform to reach interested community members. Homefinders continue to give inquiring community members the option of having a Homefinder meet with them personally or attending a monthly orientation on becoming a foster parent.

Other recruitment events included tabling at Canalside, tabling at regional farmers markets, presenting foster care information at a family event that took place at West Hertel Academy, and various Erie County Library family events.



2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

Erie County Homefinding is committed to retaining foster homes so that every child entering care can be assured of a safe place to live. 2018 was the inaugural year for ECDSS Foster Family Appreciation Picnic held at Como Lake Park. Approximately sixty foster family members attended this first-year event which promises to grow each year. Erie County Homefinding proudly supports the foster family advocacy and support provided by the Foster and Adoptive Families Association. This partnership provides a working relationship to address foster family concerns and suggestions on how to better provide service delivery. Erie County continues to utilize Baker Victory Services' Michael and Nelson Cottages as temporary foster care. These cottages provide a safe environment for children entering care when a foster home has not yet been identified for them. The cottages have the benefit of allowing foster families to get to know a child in foster care prior to receiving a placement. These matched relationships have proven to be more successful since fewer children are moved from one foster home to another. These connections appear to last, thus providing stability for the foster child.

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

Erie County's Independent Living (IL) Unit serves youth 14 to 21 who have a permanency goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). Youth may reside in foster care, in a Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP), or in a community residence and receive IL services. Youth who turn 18 have the option of leaving foster care. To plan for this possibility, IL staff assist the youth in completing a Transition Plan to aid in understanding the choice they are making and to develop a plan of success. Youth who do leave foster care have the option for re-entry and IL staff assist in that endeavor as well.

In 2018, IL assisted the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) in repatriating a youth from Canada back to the United States. The youth was settled in an Erie County foster home and is doing well.

IL has a variety of classified cases and does well in managing this variety. In terms of numbers, the cases are broken down as follows: Goal of APPLA/PINS - 16 cases; APPLA/JD - 14 cases; APPLA (neither PINS nor JD) - 82 cases. IL has also been a support to other Social Services divisions. IL has taken on 39 Say Yes cases, 17 WRAP cases, 16 B2H cases, and 12 cases where the youth's parent's rights have been terminated.

IL assisted youth attending 2018's Speak Out where foster youth have the opportunity to give their feedback on foster care to leaders in the child welfare community. IL staff continue to attend Focus on Youth and Youth in Progress meetings. IL Case Managers routinely assist other units in insuring that youth who are eligible for and interested in independent living services obtain them.

The Case Assistant and Homemaker Units provide supervision of visits between birth parents and their children who are in an out of home placement with a relative or foster parent. Both units may also provide transportation for children in foster care to their birth parents visits. Supervised visits take place mainly at our 478 Main Street office. If the supervised visits are going well, visits can be planned in the community.



2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

Case Assistants are also available to assist Case Managers with their daily work such as making collateral telephone calls. Homemakers may be assigned to assist a family in developing and carrying out a plan that enables the child in care to return home. Instruction on cleanliness and how to provide a safe environment for children are examples of such assignments.

SERVICES ELIGIBILITY TEAM

The Services Eligibility Team (SET) provides a vital function in insuring that correct reimbursement is received from State and Federal offices for services and subsidies provided by Erie County. This diligent work is geared towards keeping the local share of providing services to a minimum.

For 2018, SET completed eligibility for 86 Juvenile Delinquent or Persons In Need of Services cases each with a Medicaid case opening. This unit also reviewed and made determinations on 450 foster care packets, 127 adoptions, and 1121 preventive cases. SET made 96 SSI determinations that sought for Erie County to be payee for the child in care and using that benefit to offset the cost of providing services for that child. 24 children were referred for Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP). 19 of those cases opened.

SET was a proud part of a Federal and State IV-E audit that saw the entire State of New York pass. From that audit the Office of Child and Family Services requested to review 50 more IV-E cases which have been submitted for their review. SET also submitted 10 cases for a delinking subsidy audit in 2018.

SET continues to have two Social Welfare Examiners to keep up with the pace of kinship care cases. These are cases where a relative has accepted direct custody of a child to prevent that child from entering foster care. The relative does have the option to become certified which is a necessary step if the relative will consider Adoption or KinGAP. In 2018, there were 789 certification interviews, 92 no show, and 1078 referrals received.

ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

From January 1st to November 30th, 2018, Erie County Department of Social Services' Adult Protective Services received 2801 referrals regarding adults 18 years and older who appeared to be at risk of abuse, neglect and/or financial exploitation. Of these 2801 calls received, 65.5%, or 1836 clients, were assigned for an assessment. During this same period in 2017, APS received 2619 referrals and 69.2%, or 1814 clients, were assigned for an assessment. Referrals have increased approximately 7% from 2017 to 2018; assessments have increased 1.2% over the same period. The reduction in the percentage of cases assigned for assessment at intake of 3.7% may be attributed to intake staff providing appropriate interventions which eliminate the need for additional departmental resources while still maintaining client safety.



2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

Preventive services cases i.e., representative (rep) payee only cases, average 908.5 clients per month through 10/31/18; there was an average of 931.6 clients who received rep payee services during the same period in 2017, a reduction of 2.5%

ECDSS is currently the named guardian of 46 individuals which is an increase of 8 cases compared to the number of guardianship cases in 2017. This is a 21% increase. Guardianship cases require a higher level of oversight by the department, with caseworkers having to produce annual guardianship reports, entering into agreements with providers, liquidating assets, completing medical consent forms, and more. These cases typically remain open until the client passes away. Although an increase of 8 cases may seem negligible, the impact of increased guardianship cases is significant due to the nature of the relationship.

APS has been active in tabling and presenting through community connections at Elder Law Day, EMDT Regional Conference, and Homeless Coalition's Informational Day at the Buffalo Convention Center, and was also in attendance at the 25th Annual Adult Abuse Training Institute.

APS caseworkers have historically received cases at assessment and worked the case through closure. Depending on the client's needs, these cases may have been preventative, protective, or guardianship cases. In late 2017 and through August 2018, one team piloted a split team approach to the work in which 2 workers were assigned the assessments for the team and, if the determination was made that the client needed ongoing services, the case was transferred to the other team members for case management. This pilot was reviewed during the summer of 2018. The goal of reducing caseloads was not achieved, with average caseloads being higher than other teams.

In the fall of 2018, each team, not including intake, was given a rotating week offline with the goal of improving on-time assessments and caseload reduction while maintaining a high level of client service. The plan will be evaluated in January 2019 to assess effectiveness and efficacy.

APS plans on increasing community involvement and to provide ongoing training to staff to ensure consistent and effective community outreach. Training presentations will be standardized, accurate, and thorough, and will meet the needs of the audience. Presentations will be tracked and observed throughout the year in order to foster continuous feedback and improvement. APS staff remains active with several work groups and committees in the community, including the Council on Elder Abuse, the Enhanced Multi-Disciplinary Team, The Police Mental Health Coordinating Project, No Wrong Door, the Domestic Violence Collaborative, the Homeless



*Senior Caseworker Ebo and
Caseworker Paruta in the community*

2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

Alliance of WNY, the Hoarding Task Force, Older Adults Conferencing, the Financial Crimes Task Force, and WNY District Human Trafficking. Community organizations are invited to provide in service training for APS staff on an average of twice per month.

In 2017, there were 122 referrals of individuals aged 18-24, marking an increase of 64% from 2016. This is why APS 2018-2022 CFSR goals will drive much of the initiatives for 2019. First, APS will proactively identify youth aging out of foster care to assess their needs and to maintain their safety in the community. The next APS CFSR goal is to utilize multi-disciplinary teams and community resources to improve investigations, assessments, and service delivery to reduce risk and protect vulnerable adults. This initiative is also an approach to better identifying the needs of the large population of refugees that resettle in Buffalo.

To further support the right of self-determination and to provide the least restrictive and client-centered intervention to rep payee clients, APS staff is reviewing cases to identify clients who may benefit from one on one work with a homemaker. This work would include budgeting with the purpose of empowering the client to assume responsibility for their own funds. Once identified, the caseworker, along with supervision and community service providers, will develop a plan for the homemaker to work with the client. Bill paying responsibility will slowly be transitioned to the client. The caseworker will provide close oversight to ensure that the client is capable of paying their own bills over time prior to consulting with supervisors regarding a change in payee.

In order to assess the community's, the clients', and the referral sources' perception of APS, three survey avenues have been developed. These will be rolled out in December 2018 and into 2019. Results from these surveys are expected to contribute to strategic planning aimed at enhancing not only APS efforts, but also the community at large.

An example of a successful APS case is that of a 66 year old man who had times since 2017 due to concerns regarding his alcoholism and living client would quite often be so intoxicated that he would be unable to get to bathroom; his home was littered with human waste, empty alcohol bottles, and pizza boxes. Buffalo Fire and Police were well acquainted with the man and had responded to multiple 9-1-1 calls to assist the client. Historically, the client refused assistance beyond a transport to the emergency room. Because he was determined to make his own decisions, there was little that APS could do to assist. Senior caseworker Bill Zelazny worked with the client in a sensitive and respectful manner. The client agreed to allow APS to become a rep payee, to arrange for a cleaning blitz of his home, and to secure regular cleaning services. On Bill's last visit to the client, he reported being one month sober. APS closed the case after consulting with friends, providers, and the attorney to ensure that the client's needs were met. Bill's approach to this case was respectful and patient. He recognized the client's right to self-determination and intervened when necessary to ensure the client's safety contributed to the client's success in achieving sobriety on his own terms with assistance from family and friends.

been referred to APS four conditions. The the



2018 FAMILY WELL-BEING

Senior Caseworker Greg McCloskey began working with a client in her 80s who resided in Senior Housing but needed some assistance managing her money. The client was in receipt of approximately \$12,000 per year in social security income, for which ECDSS APS became the payee. The client also possessed a bank account with nearly \$22,000 at a local bank. ECDSS APS did not pursue guardianship on the client because she retained decision making capacities, and therefore APS could not marshal the outside funds. During home visits with the client it was not uncommon for the Senior Services Coordinator for the housing unit to sit in on meetings with the client. In June 2017, the local bank reported that someone using an ATM card had drained the client's bank account of nearly \$22,000 within a month. Greg met with the client and contacted the police; the case was subsequently referred to the District Attorney. Greg positively identified the alleged perpetrator as the Senior Services Coordinator of the client's senior housing. Greg gave testimony against the alleged perpetrator to the Grand Jury and the perpetrator was indicted on defrauding three elderly clients. Greg's attention to detail was pivotal in the indictment.

COMPREHENSIVE EMPLOYMENT DIVISION

The Comprehensive Employment Division (CED) provides a wide array of services and supports to Temporary Assistance and SNAP applicants and recipients. These services and supports are designed to assist individuals and families on the path to self-sufficiency. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) provides funding to social services districts and community partners to deliver a wide range of employment services. A monthly average of 77% of all employable families is engaged in work preparation activities designed to lead to self-sufficiency. Contracted service providers and community partners play an integral part in engaging individuals in work activities. The department partners with the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County to administer a work program. Work hub sites are located at the following community centers throughout Erie County: Belle Center, Catholic Charities - Lackawanna, Gloria J Parks, Lt. Matt Urban, Northwest Buffalo, and Seneca Babcock. In order to meet the required number of work participation hours mandated by the State and Federal government Temporary Assistance case, participants are engaged in work activities including but not limited to work experience, education (HSE and ESL), financial literacy, job skills training, vocational training, job readiness training, supervised job search, job development, job placement, retention services, case management, and monitoring and support for compliance with treatment plans for individuals with substance abuse, medical, or mental health disorders who have the potential for self-sufficiency.



*Senior Caseworker Hinterberger
(center) in the community*

2018 FAMILY INDEPENDENCE

The work hub site supervisor and DSS staff work with participants to address barriers to employment and to create an individualized experience meant to enhance both work skills and soft skills. Workers also assist participants in obtaining appropriate supportive services, and, when appropriate, demonstrate job proficiency and job-keeping skills, and transition into positions within either the private or public sector. In an effort to develop a more advanced awareness of the availability of adequate services for participants in largely populated areas, an analysis was conducted of where Erie County's Temporary Assistance population resides. As a result, the Town of Cheektowaga was identified as an area that would benefit from expanded services. A partnership was developed with Erie | BOCES Cheektowaga.

As evidence of its efforts, CED is the statewide district leader in client participation rates, averaging 33.9% in 2018, as per OTDA published reports. Achieving this rate helps NYS reach the required state participation rate, thereby avoiding a federal fiscal penalty. In 2018, CED engaged a monthly average of 1476 clients in work preparation activities. This resulted in a contribution of a monthly average of 39,603 work hours to nonprofit agencies, and simultaneously, provided opportunities for the client to gain work experience and to attend educational and vocational classes. As of October 30th, 2018, 2069 Temporary Assistance recipients were placed in unsubsidized or subsidized employment by CED staff, resulting in a cost savings for the district. This was achieved through contract agencies, DSS job fairs, the PIVOT program, and participant efforts. Furthermore, in order to enable a monthly average of 1411 families to maintain employment and 300 families to transition off of Temporary Assistance benefits, a monthly average of 2724 children received day care assistance through the low income subsidy program.

The Placing Individuals in Vital Opportunity Training (PIVOT) program, a wage subsidy program for Temporary Assistance families, was successful in placing 302 Temporary Assistance recipients into a job as of October 30th, 2018. 65% of those placed in 2017 maintained their employment for the entirety of the contracted 6 months. 75% of those that completed the contract period met an additional 6 months employment retention benchmark. CED expanded the employer base for the program by establishing

relationships with 21 new employers in 2018. CED administers an on-site Job Club that provides job readiness training for Temporary Assistance applicants and recipients. As of October 2018, this program diverted a monthly average of 53% of TANF applicants and 92% of Safety Net individuals from assistance. 245 applicants were placed in employment prior to case opening, resulting in a cost savings to the district. Job development services were enhanced in Job Club through a partnership with the NYS Department of Labor, which provided a representative weekly to provide job leads on-site. This assistance resulted in an additional job search resource for our clients seeking employment.



An intensive case management component was included in all employment services contracts in 2018. The following providers were contracted to provide this case management: Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education, Community College-CAST, Goodwill Industries of WNY, Salvation Army, and WNY Independent Living-Mental Health Peer Connection. 756 participants engaged in their programs were able to identify and address factors that may have contributed to their program non-compliance and to engage in appropriate work preparation activities. Case management services included outreach efforts to engage participants, referral and linkage to community resources, specialized assessments, advocacy and the development of life management skills. Arrangements were also made with the contracted providers to provide their services to 80 Safety Net Individuals at no additional cost, resulting in an increased number of

2018 FAMILY INDEPENDENCE

participants who were able to receive services.

The Coordinated Service Team was created to better serve individuals presenting with substance use disorders. This team is comprised of Employment Counselors who work with Erie County Medical Center Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselors in an office co-located with Temporary Assistance eligibility workers. The co-location model effectively and efficiently services the applicants in one location leading to better service delivery.

CED continued its partnership with Society for the Advancement of Construction-Related Arts (SACRA). This partnership provides the opportunity for DSS clients to attend a program that teaches skills in craftsmanship and construction. Since the program's inception in September 2017, 37 DSS clients have enrolled in the program. 86% of these clients have successfully completed the program and 78% obtained employment in Construction or Advanced Manufacturing positions.

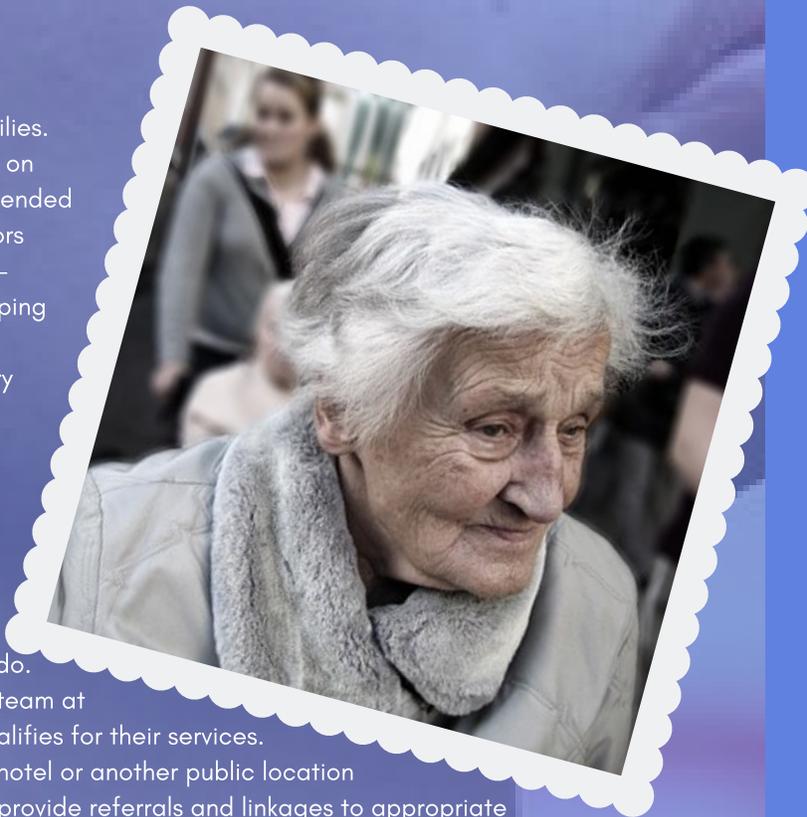
TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE

Temporary Assistance (TA) sought ways to provide customers access to services and supports. A pilot Skype program was implemented through a partnership between CED, Temporary Assistance, and Horizon Village to provide services to individuals who are residing in inpatient treatment facilities. This approach eliminates the need for in-person interviews and therefore reduces risk factors associated with a potential relapse. During this pilot, a select number of TA applicants residing at Horizon Village's congregate care facility had their eligibility and employment interviews conducted via Skype. This redesign has facilitated positive outcomes for customers and the treatment provider community by granting clients a new and enhanced way to access services.

An initiative was designed to pilot extended hours in order to better meet the needs of our working clients and their families. Beginning March 22nd, 2018, ECDSS offered extended hours on Thursdays at our 158 Pearl Street location. The hours were extended past the routine closing time of 4 PM to 5:45 PM with the doors closing at 6:00. Extended-hour service included: general information about ECDSS services, obtaining benefit cards, dropping off or picking up paperwork, reporting changes in case circumstances to the agency, filing applications for Temporary Assistance and SNAP benefits, screening for expedited SNAP benefits, and (if eligible) on-the-spot- SNAP interviews. Medicaid services were not included in the pilot.

Through collaboration with Restoration Society (RS), TA was able to design a program in which clients who are placed in hotels can participate in rapid rehousing programs and case management services in the same way that shelter residents do. Case workers use a newly created referral form to notify the team at Restoration Society that we are placing an individual who qualifies for their services.

A member of the RS team meets with the client either at the hotel or another public location convenient to the client to begin the enrollment process and provide referrals and linkages to appropriate community services. In a separate collaboration with NYS Parole, the Homeless unit is making safer and more informed placements of newly released parolees. Using a newly created referral form, Parole Officers are able to notify us of any



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placement restrictions prior to the client's arrival at the office. In some instances, we have been able to prearrange placement and reduce client wait times.

TA was able to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness through support, innovation, and continuous service delivery improvement. The program established key performance reports by collaborating with our Technical Support Unit to begin to identify performance measures and create reports to support management in determining how well an area is performing. Furthermore, TA fostered a Homeless and Domestic Violence Collaboration. Using a newly created referral form, clients are routed directly to an Erie County DV liaison for an assessment when a DV situation is indicated. The ECDV liaisons not only assess the clients but also perform shelter placements in and out of county and develop safety plans. This system replaced the previous procedure utilizing an on-site representative from Haven House who only made brief assessments and placed only at Haven House. The new process is being utilized by an average of 30 clients per month.

An on-site Mental Health (MH) Counselor was added to the staff of the homeless team. Homeless examiners use a newly created Mental Health Assessment form to refer clients for immediate assessments, crisis intervention, or referral. In turn, the MH counselor is able to provide real time information about a client's MH status and/or any accommodations needed for placement. The MH counselor is also being used to help Erie County Medical Center behavioral health hospital discharges navigate the homeless application process.

A workgroup was formed to examine the old process and forms used for Household Establishment Grants. The group was able to redesign and simplify the process using newly created forms. The process was changed to allow Head SWEs approval of the grant rather than waiting for an Administrative approval. Changes to the process have significantly reduced the wait times between client application and ability to shop for approved items.

TA also worked to enhance employees' skills. One such way was gaining access to the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Homeless team examiners, through a partnership with the Homeless Alliance, were trained on and given access to the HMIS. HMIS has given the Case Workers access to information regarding a client's previous homeless occurrences, family composition, and valuable information about participation in treatment and/or rapid rehousing programs.

To further enhance skills, trainings on Professional Boundaries and Etiquette, Culture of Poverty, Diversity: Breaking down the Barriers, and Customer Service were mandated for staff. Reception staff were mandated to attend de-escalation training. Quarterly meetings with all of TA staff kept staff members current about policies, procedures, and the technology changes affecting TA. These meetings also offer staff the opportunity to share ideas and concerns with their leadership team.

TA seeks to further their accomplishment of providing new ways for clients to access services and supports. One way to do this will be to expand TA's eligibility interviews for individuals residing in an inpatient treatment setting via video conferencing to include other Congregate Care treatment facilities beyond Horizon Village. They also intend to re-vamp the extended hours pilot. The data gained since the roll-out of extended hours will be evaluated to identify the challenges to its success. This re-vamp will involve a new and improved structure based on data and feedback from clients and community partners. Measures are to include changing the day of the week and the services offered.

Improved collaboration with hotels where homeless clients are placed is another goal of TA. The program hopes to establish a quarterly meeting to identify delays in billing and implement improvements to establish timely billing submission and payment to mirror the homeless shelter bill process. It also seeks to implement an Agile Project Management Approach

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among Administrators. Agile Project Management focuses on continuous improvement, scope flexibility, team input, and delivery essential quality products.

To increase the accessibility of services to Non-English speaking clients, an Arabic Examiner will be established with an Arabic case load. Furthermore, Spanish speaking cases will be assigned to Spanish speaking examiners. TA will also review staffing needs to secure a Social Case Supervisor - Unit Position to manage Homeless and Domestic Violence case worker staff.

To further enhance employee skills and optimize performance, TA has established several objectives. One is to engage in succession planning for retirements, so that the responsibilities can be transferred smoothly when a supervisor leaves their position. Furthermore, TA will continue to work with HRD to identify needs and bring fresh and new training opportunities to staff. Management will also review and revise expectations and roles for each level of staffing to reflect changes in expectations and technology. Finally, a managerial performance measurement will be developed, along with an administrative tool, to support standardization coaching for performance and disciplinary actions.

TA plans on taking steps to maximize the use of leading edge technologies to improve outcomes. Utilizing Onbase to link the documentation for homeless placement bills to the actual billing statement, will minimize processing time. This allows for a task based approach to bill payment and improved vendor payment tracking. Furthermore, implementing a caseload-based IM tracker will track mail and phone calls for all under-care cases. This will provide data to support the establishment of appropriate case load size and performance measures, and allow for targeted overtime based on task or overdue status of tasks as well as improved customer service.

A final goal for 2019 is to centralize TA under case teams in one building. Locating staff in one building will allow for better use of clerical staff, improve communication among teams, and improve managerial coverage.

HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP)

Program access and participation rates were increased through the promotion of electronic application filing for regular HEAP benefits. The number of MyBenefits HEAP applications received on-line increased from 6,438 in the 2016-2017 season to 8,587 in the 2017-2018 season. This was achieved through increased collaboration with Erie County Libraries, community based organizations, and the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. This change increases accessibility for clients and makes it more convenient to apply.

In a further attempt to improve the client's experience when gaining access to their payments, HEAP made it a goal to accelerate payments to customer accounts by making direct data entry on Temporary Assistance and SNAP cases the same day the HEAP application is received. This direct data entry has been initiated for all under care maintenance cases in the HEAP interview process. Payment reviews have been decreased from 13 days to 6 days for a faster payment to customer accounts.

Customer service was also improved through various changes which increased the program's efficiency. For one, most applications are now processed in MyWorkspace. Furthermore, the program was relocated to a newly renovated office space at 460 Main Street and is co-located with Emergency Assistance to Families & Adults and TA Utilities to better serve clients with both utility and emergency service needs. Finally, the conversion to a Cisco phone center enables all staff to assist with the HEAP call center.

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In the 2017-2018 HEAP season, there were a total of 117,620 regular benefits. 60,066 of these were autopays. 26,844 emergency benefits were distributed during this same season, along with 4,068 total second emergency benefits. Clients placed 28,087 calls into the phone center. 8,587 applications for HEAP benefits were received online, whereas the total number of applications sent by individual request was 3,874. 1,427 more applications for benefits were approved at 41 community outreach events during this season. 343 households were assisted through the clean and tune for furnaces program, and 415 households were helped with heating repair and replacement. An additional 4,068 households were served outside of the winter HEAP season by the cooling program.

HEAP seeks to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness through support, innovation, and continuous service delivery improvement. One objective to meet this goal is to coordinate with Emergency Services and TA utilities to streamline and integrate utility programs to more efficiently serve Erie County clients. Next, an increase in the ability to serve online customers will be attempted in order to decrease the volume of walk-in clients. Finally, HEAP intends to track the number of home weatherization program referrals to NYSERDA for eligible clients to increase energy efficiency in their homes.

HEAP benefit supplements are no longer issued to households where a regular benefit has been received by a household member who is not responsible for paying the utilities bill. Due to this change there has been an increase in EAA/EAF client volume. Furthermore, HEAP regular benefit holds are now only issued to households that are in threat of utility disconnection



Opening 460 Main Street

2018 YOUTH SERVICES

ERIE COUNTY YOUTH BUREAU

The Erie County Youth Bureau (ECYB) annually grants funding to community-based organizations providing positive youth development programs throughout Erie County. Agencies are selected to receive funding through a competitive process in which the agency's past performance, monitoring, and performance measures are also taken into consideration. The ECYB also enables Local Youth Bureaus to be eligible for New York State aid to run youth service and recreation programs. Youth services are offered in the following funding categories: Youth Development Programs (YDP), Runaway & Homeless Youth Agencies (RHYA), and Summer Primetime Programs.

Each agency or Local Youth Bureau receiving funding is required to show performance measures. These measures provide data that demonstrates the qualitative and quantitative impact that the agencies are making in the lives of youth. In addition, these agencies are subject to annual, unannounced, onsite monitoring visits in order to ensure that youth are receiving the highest level of quality programming available. In 2018, funding was used to serve approximately 11,500 youth year round and 4,700 through summer programming. Through the Youth Development Programs, 71 agencies were able to access funding for the 2018 school year. 63 agencies were approved for funding through the Summer Primetime Programs.

ECYB also worked to engage youth in developing work skills by collaborating with DSS's Summer Youth Employment Program to provide a Workforce Development program. This program allowed teens to work 4 hours per day in conjunction with the development of soft skills for 4 hours per day through resume preparation, customer service tips, and learning about appropriate workplace attire, among other things.

Along with 4 children and a chaperone from Buffalo Urban League, ECYB was able to attend and assist with the Association of New York State Youth Bureaus Youth Leadership Conference. The children learned about afterschool funding, spoke with local senators and assemblywomen, and attended a presentation by Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul. ECYB also attended and assisted with the WNY Legislative Breakfast for Afterschool Network of WNY, the School Age Leadership Summit for Afterschool Network of WNY, and the Western New York Youth Bureau and Associations Youth Leadership Forum.

To commemorate National Summer Learning Day 2018, the Afterschool Network of WNY, in partnership with the City of Buffalo, Say Yes Buffalo and the NYS Network for Youth Success, celebrated the importance of summer learning at an Outer Harbor event. Numerous fun, engaging, and educational activities took place throughout the grounds during this exciting summer event. ECYB also put on the 2018 Primetime Picnic at Chestnut Ridge Park for 250 children who attended various agencies funded by Primetime. This annual picnic is a chance for the agencies to meet and enjoy a day of activities together.

ECYB collaborated in implementing a Bullying Taskforce designed to serve the neediest children and families by examining the issue of bullying as it exists in the Buffalo Public School district. This includes, among other things, its root causes, the laws and regulations that govern anti-bullying efforts, and interventions that have successfully been used in other districts.



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Raise the Age legislation was implemented on October 1st, 2018 and increased the age of criminal responsibility to 17 years old. On October 1st of 2019, the age will be 18. A smooth transition into raise the age legislation was due to diligent work by Erie County Youth Services beginning on January 1st, 2018. Youth Services was represented in each of the Raise the Age Subcommittees, which were the Law Enforcement Subcommittee, Youth Part (Court) Subcommittee, Legal Representation Subcommittee, and Facilities Subcommittee. The purpose of these Subcommittees was to have all of Erie County's system of care work together in a collaborative effort to prepare for the start of the legislation. Systems were in place and ready to be fully operational when Raise the Age began on October 1st, and implementation has gone very well. The intake of youth to Erie Secure Detention has gone very smoothly as communication has been good between the court system, law enforcement, and Erie Secure Youth Detention Center.

The number of critical incidents, or incidents of youth aggression towards others, remains low on an almost monthly basis at Erie Secure Youth Detention Center, averaging approximately 2-5 incidents per month. There were even zero critical incidents among Adolescent Offenders from October 30th, 2018 through November 30th, 2018. This is a result of continued emphasis by Youth Detention workers, Juvenile Justice Counselor staff, and Youth Services staff who practice active supervision, mentoring, coaching and teaching with the youth. In addition, a continued practice of Solution Focused Trauma Informed Care (SF-TIC) throughout the facility is helping to build positive therapeutic relationships between staff and youth.

Renovations are complete on a 16 bed pod (Orange Pod) and it now meets the new physical plant regulations for the specialized secure youth population which are the 16-year-old Adolescent Offenders. Renovations have begun on another 16 bed pod (Yellow Pod) in order to have a pod which meets all of the new physical plant requirements for the Raise the Age population of youth.

The Erie County Secure Youth Detention conducted enhanced training for all Youth Detention staff to better equip them to work with youth who have a mental health diagnosis, especially in preparation for Raise the Age legislation. In addition to this training as well as completing mandated trainings, emphasis was placed on positive youth engagement, active supervision, conflict resolution, and crisis de-escalation. Additional trainings and informational meetings were held to prepare for Raise the Age.

Many high quality youth development programs were brought in throughout 2018 to work with the youth who temporarily reside at Erie Secure Detention Center. These programs are well received by and have a positive impact on the youth. Some of these programs were:

- Young Audiences of WNY: Professional artists provide arts instruction and education to residents. Artists visit over the course of the year providing exposure to visual arts, theater, poetry, dance, music and multi-cultural experiences. Two artists visit per week.
- F-Bites with Chef Bobby: Professional Chef and former runner-up on Fox Network's cooking competition television program Hell's Kitchen teaches the youth culinary skills and team work, as well as providing mentorship to youth residents.
- Willie Hutch-Jones Sports and Education: WHJ provides chess instruction. The youth learn the origins, fundamentals and strategies of chess. They practice throughout the week. Chess instruction is also used as a model for making good life choices.
- Project LEE: Prominent local clergyman Reverend Copeland provides mentorship, leadership development and life lessons. Rev. Copeland works in several local high schools and leads groups of community mentors which he recruits, trains and coordinates.

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· Shifting Gears: Provided by local businesswoman Beverly Johnson, Shifting Gears is a leadership development program for teens. This program has been successfully implemented in several community locations over the past few years. We have been very impressed with the success the Ms. Johnson has had in engaging at-risk young people and providing valuable life skills. Ms. Johnson will work with both male and female residents but we are especially pleased to provide another positive female role model for the female residents. Vision Boarding and goal setting plans are just some of the activities in which Shifting Gears engages residents.

In addition to youth development programs, the Erie County Youth Detention Center provides a full school day with 5.5 hours of instruction each day. The youth are given school instruction from fully certified teachers. The youth often comment on how positive and beneficial the school program is for them.

On average, Erie County Secure Detention had a daily population of 8 Erie County Youth in 2018. This is a reduction from 2017, which saw an average daily population of 10 Erie County Youth. This reduction is a result of the positive community based programs with which DSS and Youth Services contracts. By keeping youth home with positive community based programming and services, we are reducing the number who need to come to secure detention. In addition, youth services contracts with STSJP programs which specifically focus on alternatives to detention that are proving to be very effective in this area.