May your New Year be filled with joy, hope, and love for your family!

AFN is also grateful for the opportunity to do this work and would like to continue meeting the needs of the parents as they travel the journey with their children. AFN is thankful that the County regards what we provide for the families enhances children with special needs. Foundations such as, the Heinz Endowments, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Edith Trees Charitable Trust, Staunton Farms Foundation and Forbes Funds, to mention a few, are all in favor of the services AFN offers to the families, who have become Family Support Partners and even a Supervisor! It is such a thrill to see the Supervisors work hard to maintain a great accountability process to ensure staff are doing their jobs to the best of their abilities to meet our QA requirements.

AFN also believes in offering Quality Assurance (QA) measures to the families and the Supervisors work hard to maintain a great accountability process to ensure staff are doing their jobs to the best of their abilities to meet our QA requirements. The uniqueness of what AFN does is a value-added feature for the families in Allegheny County.

AFN is pleased to say, we now employ 49 family members who are giving back in their own way to other families. Many staff members received one-on-one support from AFN and then they joined our Parent Advisory Board and from there, moved on to become Family Support Partners and even a Supervisor! It is such a thrill to witness these stages of transformations.

AFN is thankful that the County regards what we provide for the families enhances their lives. Foundations such as, the Heinz Endowments, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Edith Trees Charitable Trust, Staunton Farms Foundation and Forbes Funds, to mention a few, are all in favor of the services AFN offers to the families, who have children with special needs.

AFN is also grateful for the opportunity to do this work and would like to continue meeting the needs of the parents as they travel the journey with their children.

May your New Year be filled with joy, hope, and love for your family!

Ruth Fox, CEO
FROM THE HEART

Presenting to parents at the 28th Annual National Federation of Families Conference in Orlando, Florida, November 8-11, 2017, gave me the opportunity to share my experience, strength, and hope as a family member, and employee of Allegheny Family Network.

It was my honor and privilege to scrape the surface of the absence of my father in my life and the profound effect it had on me as a child. Using it as my strength to motivate myself to be a father to my four children, (one who is diagnosed with ADHD and depression,) who lost their mother to cancer.

If it wasn’t for my grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Leo and Elizabeth Kelley, teaching me the value of family, love for myself, benefits of hard work, respect for others, and respect for the law of the land, I wouldn’t be one of the productive member of society today, which makes me appreciate my grandparents even more.

The pleasure was all mine as I thanked AFN for the hope and continued support that is provided to me and my family. I also thank AFN for the necessary resources, education, life skills, and support to help restore us to a better quality of life.

I could never repay or thank Ms. Ruth Fox, CEO, as well as traumatic events, such as the loss of my dearly loved one.

I would like to take the time to thank everyone at AFN for welcoming me into your family. The Fathers Involved Now Program has been very beneficial. The trip to Orlando for the Federation of Families Conference really clarified and helped me understand a lot of things that didn’t make sense to me before.

The trip took me out of the stressful and hostile environment and gave me a chance to relax, unwind and re-strategize. The mental health workshops I attended while there helped me understand what my daughter is going through and showed me how to take different approaches on dealing and interacting with her.

I thank you all for the opportunity and experience and I hope that I can continue to be a part of this outstanding program.

Sincerely, Gable Morris

AN AFN PARENT’S EXPERIENCE AT THE FEDERATION OF FAMILIES CONFERENCE

Adults enrolled in Allegheny Family Network’s Adult Education Program are graduating with their General Education Diplomas and preparing for the future. AFN launched the pilot classroom located in the Natrona Heights / Brackenridge, Allegheny County in March, 2017 as a direct response to a need identified at Highlands Area Community Cabinet (HACC) Support Group. HACC members Autumn Monaghan, Rosedale Drake and Camilla Cowell headed meetings held to design the program so that it effectively addressed the challenges local parents and adults faced when attempting to pursue their diploma. These challenges included transportation to the test sites, instruction about the curriculum and test material, childcare during class times and the cost of taking the four test sections.

“This GED program … has allowed me to continue my education when nobody else believed in me,” said Nicole Rowan, a student. “It has allowed me to become the mother I’ve always wanted to be. I am and will forever be grateful for this opportunity!”

In March, adults began to enroll and attend the classes, held twice per week in the lower level of the Generations House of Worship church in Brackenridge. The Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) provides a teacher and materials for the students and AFN provides childcare during class time. Students learn about math, science, reading and social studies from the teacher and volunteer tutors and then take a practice test online to see if they are prepared to test out of the subject. AFN also provides the funding and transportation, if necessary, to the test site at the CareerLinks office in New Kensington.

The pilot program received support from the school district, local businesses and organizations and community members with donations of laptops, test sponsors and monetary donations for practice vouchers.

With support from the community, AFN, and the peers in the classroom, students are retaining the education and passing sections of the GED test at an impressive rate compared to other established GED programs. The pilot program currently has 15 students actively enrolled and celebrated its first graduation in November 2017 with two more students having prepared to graduate in December 2017.

Other students are attending with a 95% attendance rate and are testing out of sections each week.

In addition to the prep work and testing, AFN invites individuals who have obtained their GEDs and are successful in the workforce or their careers to speak in the class. Educational institutions also come to the class to teach about the enrollment and financial aid processes for those interested in attending school after their GEDs. In January, AFN will host a job fair at the site with local companies, businesses and labor unions who are interested in hiring the graduates. AFN also connects the parents to other resources available through the organization, such as trainings, parent groups, events and activities.

The program already is seeing results affecting the lives and families of the adult students. Parents report back to the group that it is easier to help their children with homework and they feel more invested in their children’s education. They also feel that once they achieve the goal of passing the GED tests, they will have a higher success of obtaining employment with better wages and setting, and achieving future goals, as well.

“This program is helping me to teach my children that education is important at any age,” student Arlene Yagle said. “With its family-like support system and motivation from the facilitators and AFN workers – as well as the childcare – I’ve been able to stick through the classes and I’m almost ready to graduate.”

Arlene invited her brother, Steven, to join the class as well. “Having my GED means a better future for me, better jobs … maybe someday a boat in the Caribbean, maybe not. But at least with a proper education my dreams have a better chance of becoming a reality.”

AFN currently is seeking funding from grants and other sources in order to expand the program into other communities in Allegheny County.

Adults interested in attending the classes in the Natrona Heights / Brackenridge area can enroll by stopping in to the class any Tuesday or Thursday from Noon to 2:30 PM. Adults living in other areas can follow AFN’s Facebook page or visit the www.alleghenynetwork.org website to stay up-to-date when classrooms are able to launch in other Allegheny County communities.

Misty Chybuzynski

AFN SHARE

LAUNCHING EDUCATIONAL DREAMS INTO REALITIES: ALLEGHENY FAMILY NETWORK’S ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Sincerely, Gable Morris
Allegheny Family Network has had the privilege to present at the Federation of Families Conference and did so at this year’s FOP Conference in Orlando, Florida. The following are synopses of the presentations they gave.

Alda Walker, Training Coordinator

toni Wagner, AFN Chief Operating Officer
Christa Jones, Parent Coordinator/Executive Administrative Assistant

“Weaving the Quilt: Collaboration Makes Things Come Together”

Creating a family partnership through collaboration is like weaving a masterpiece. Each person is unique and when brought together contributes their own individuality to helping families set their goals and ultimately meet their vision. This session explored the importance of viewing families as partners in dealing with the mental health of their children and ways to increase participation from system partners the family may be involved with along with natural and community supports.

George Fleming, Fathers Involved Now Supervisor

“The Missing Link – Crisis in Fatherhood”

More than 20 million children live in a home without the physical presence of a father. If it were classified as a health crisis, fatherlessness would be an epidemic worthy of attention as a national emergency. The Missing Link workshop focused on a service system that will provide a framework for addressing this very real crisis that is impacting our children, families and communities.

THE SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY

Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL) in Pittsburgh brought the jolly this 2017 Christmas to hundreds of families who are served by Allegheny Family Network. JLL employees selected a tag from an office “Angel Tree” and shopped for the perfect gifts for the children of parents who AFN supports throughout the year with advocacy, training and other services.

AFN connected with JLL through Dominic Amato, Family Support Partner who works in the Court Program and the Children Youth and Families program at AFN. Once JLL heard about the mission of AFN, they were immediately on board selecting AFN as the Pittsburgh office beneficiary for this Christmas season. About 175 names were collected and created into Angel Tags to be placed on the JLL office tree.

“Allegheny Family Network thanks JLL for its generosity and kindness during the holiday season,” said Mrs. Ruth Fox, CEO of AFN. “We are excited to be able to support our families through the holiday with the generosity of other companies and organizations.”

AFN children also received toys provided by the Marine Corps Toys for Tots Foundation of the Pittsburgh area. More than 250 toys were donated, including bicycles, skateboards and art kits, to help parents who AFN serves. Marine Corps First Sgt. Jason Polanco worked with Chief Operation Officer, Mrs. Toni Wagner, to coordinate the toy distribution to AFN.

The Christmas cheer didn’t stop there for AFN families. Family Support Partners who recognized parents in need with a greater desire to embrace the holiday spirit for their children, coordinated the donations of holiday decorations and even Christmas trees for the families.

Misty Chyhyrynski

As time goes on, families grow and their needs change. Our monthly support groups are a compliment to the one-on-one support services that Allegheny Family Network offers to families raising children with mental health and/or behavioral challenges. At AFN we are always changing and working to provide services that will enable dads, moms, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and all caregivers of children with special needs and/or behavioral challenges to network with others and to explore and discuss topics that are relevant for the families. So over the past nine years our support groups have tried to meet the families’ desires and concerns.

We are pleased to update you on the recent additions in our list of support groups: A new Fathers Involved Now support group for dads who are raising children with mental health and/or behavioral challenges will be starting on the second Monday of the month, from 12 noon to 2:00 pm, in McKees Rocks, at the Sto-Rox Community Resource Center, 420 Chartiers Avenue, McKees Rocks, PA 15136.

We are also starting a new group called “Women Rocking Wellness” at the Sto-Rox Community Resource Center on the 3rd Tuesdays of the month, from 12 noon – 2:30 pm, with Carla Thompson, Family Support Partner.

Currently we are looking for a new location for the Fathers Involved Now, North Side group. Check out our www.alleghenyfamilynetwork.org website and Facebook page for updates on this group.

Our goal has always been for parents to take on the responsibilities of running the group they attend while working with the AFN facilitator for the group’s success. Input from all the members is important to develop the group’s focus, too.

Our support groups provide a range of connections for you: socialization, trainings, creative outlet, community, fun, and time with other parents who may be dealing with some of the same issues as you, to name a few. We hope you will take advantage of attending one of our support groups close to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Christine Snyder, JPT Supervisor/Coach at 412-438-6120.

AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION CLASS

AFN’s Agents of Transformation Class members, (photo-left to right) Karen Clark, Ellen Collier, Nina Lewis, Sharhonda Jones, Sarah Shuba and Sherry Ray graduated on November 20, 2017. Since 2013, 60 parents and staff members have attended a six to eight week course and explored the skills needed to become advocates for their families and other parents.

Some of the components of the AOT curriculum include: Leadership development, communication skills, group facilitation, understanding how government in PA works, and affecting policy change.

Congratulations Graduates!
January
6 Fathers Involved Now, McKees Rocks—Celebrating Fatherhood: This session will teach men how and what to celebrate.
12 Mothers United—To Be Announced.
14 Dual Diagnosis—Valentine’s Day: To Be Announced.
15 Highland’s Area Community Center—Starting a Men’s Group in the Community: Bringing fathers out to help with what HACC is trying to accomplish—Men reaching out to Men.
17 Local Social—Opportunity to be announced.
18 Tri-Boro Networking Support Group—Self-Esteem & Self-Care: Speaker to be announced. Discussion on the topic of Self-Esteem and Self Care.
21 Turn It Up Network—Relationships: And the Big D: Emotions can be a man’s worst enemy. With the epidemic of sadness we will explore why emotions are the worst enemy through open discussion.
22 Foster Parents Support Group—Planning-Spring is coming: We have been meeting for a year. Where do we want our group to go? What do we want to do?

February
8 Fathers Involved Now, McKees Rocks—Men and Today’s Stress: Why are emergency room visits directly related to stress? Come see how “Cooping” is the key.
10 Mom’s United—A New Day: A New Perception: Group interaction through discussion and ice breaker. What and where do we want to see Mom’s United involve ourselves this year.
15 Highland’s Area Community Center—Starting a Men’s Group in the Community: Bringing fathers out to help with what HACC is trying to accomplish—Men reaching out to Men.
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AFN Family Support Groups and AEFN Events Information

AFN SUPPORT GROUP CALENDAR 2018

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