

## **MORE ABOUT THE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM**

Family Engagement Unit of the McKean County Department of Human Services utilizes Family Group Decision Making as a model in working with children and their families. The model expands the involvement of immediate family members, extended kin, support persons and communities in planning for child safety, permanency and well-being. The model is helpful in; increasing safety for children and families, engaging families and communities in the helping process, resolving concerns, strengthening families, building independence, creating an attitude of hope for families and helping professionals and avoiding worker burnout.

### **Mission and Purpose**

Family Engagement is strength-based, family-centered, child-focused and culturally sensitive approach. It is based on the belief that the best care, planning and protection for youth and children can be achieved when the positive aspects and strengths of the families are aligned with community and human service agencies. This partnership supports the family and facilitates their planning for the safety, care and protection of youth, children and the community.

The purpose of Family Group Decision Making is to offer a practice in which families plan for themselves through a family meeting, not an agency meeting. This objective is met by creating an environment where the family has the opportunity to:

### **Values and Beliefs**

- Families have strengths and can change
- Strengths are what ultimately resolve concerns
- Strengths are discovered through listening, noticing and paying attention to people
- Strengths are enhanced when they are acknowledged and encouraged
- People gain a sense of hope when they feel someone has really listened to them
- Options are preferable to advice
- Empowering people is preferable to controlling them
- A consultant is more helpful to people than a boss

## The Family Meeting

The actual Family Group Decision meeting focuses on establishing a safe environment which facilitates honest and open communication among participants. The meeting begins with ground rules, introductions, including an explanation of each participant's connection to the family. The purpose of the meeting is then discussed and consensus is reached. This is an outline of what typically happens at a Family Meeting.

- Introduction: Greetings, family traditions, guide lines and purpose are discussed
- Information Sharing: Everyone is given the opportunity to ask questions and share information
- Private Family Time: All service providers leave and the family develops their own plan aimed at serving the best interest of the child
- Presentation of the Plan: The entire group comes together again and the family presents their plan, which may be strengthened as needed

After the Family Meeting the plan is distributed to all attendees, those identified in the plan follow through with their commitments, and follow-up meetings are scheduled to review progress.

Family Group Decision Making is provided in McKean County through the Family Engagement Unit of the McKean County Department of Human Services.