



## **Foster Care and Community Programs Family Group Decision-Making - Pennsylvania**

### **Description**

In the child welfare system, there has been an increasing need for creative and innovative programming that provides alternatives to out-of-home placements for children. The Family Group Decision-Making Initiative is one such technique: an approach that seeks to ensure child safety within his or her own family and community.

Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) empowers families to take responsibility for the care and protection of their children. The model is based on the philosophy that family members have intimate knowledge and information about themselves that few outside the family will ever know. Thus, the family is clearly in the best position to make decisions regarding the care and safety of its members. The Family Group Decision-Making process is in contrast to traditional child welfare practice methods in that, rather than focusing on family deficiencies, the process recognizes and utilizes the family's strengths and expertise. Families who have been a part of the decision-making process are more likely to participate in services aimed at keeping their families together. The FGDM process challenges child welfare workers to accept the plans developed by families as long as they are legal, possible and keep the children safe.

### **Program objectives**

There are several basic values and beliefs of FGDM practice, including:

- Families have strengths and can change
- Strengths are identified 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.

Using the philosophy described above, FGDM assists children in making and maintaining healthy connections with permanent resources and is a valuable tool in helping teens transition to adulthood, supports increasing safety for children, improving the timeliness of the permanency planning process, reducing foster care re-entries, improving the stability of placements and enhancing the capacity for families to provide for their children's needs.

### **Population served/criteria for acceptance**

The FGDM technique has been used successfully for many of the varied concerns of the child welfare system. The eligibility criteria for referrals to the Family Group Decision-Making process are simply that the referring worker has hope for the family and is willing and able to support a plan developed by the family as long as the plan is safe, legal and possible. Family participants must be willing to engage in the process; FGDM is not effectively forced onto families; rather it emphasizes voluntary participation. The process has been found to be effective for keeping children safe in their homes, returning children safely from foster care, identifying best placement options for children, stabilizing placements (foster care or others) and assisting youth in transitioning out of agency care. Families experiencing domestic violence or abuse issues may require additional training and support before, during and after FGDM conferences, as recommended by the referring worker.

### **Locations:**

1650 Broadway  
Bethlehem, PA 18015  
610-799-8350

534 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue  
Duncansville, PA 16635  
814-693-7708

Water Tower Square  
1020 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 2B  
Williamsport, PA 17701  
570-326-7811

355 Saylor Street  
Schuylkill Haven, PA 17972  
570-385-7215

### ***For additional information, please contact:***

**KidsPeace National Centers, Administrative Offices, 480 Pierce Street, Suite 311, New Bridge Center, Kingston, PA 18704 • 800-727-4482 admissions@kidspeace.org • 800-8KID-123 • fax 610-799-8900**

**www.kidspeace.org**