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PA Supreme Court to Hold Second Phase of Child Dependency Training Sessions
13 Additional Counties Join Initiative to Improve Lives of Dependent Children

HARRISBURG, August 3, 2009 – As part of a statewide initiative to improve the lives of dependent children, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania will hold three training sessions in August featuring Kevin Campbell – a nationally known youth permanency expert and creator of Family Finding, a strategy aimed at finding lost or forgotten individuals willing to provide lifelong support for abused and neglected children.

More than 160 judges, state, county and private sector children and youth professionals from surrounding areas (*see attached*) will be attending training sessions scheduled for:

- August 4 and 5; at the Rustic Lodge, 2199 Oakland Avenue, Indiana, PA
- August 6 and 7; at the Adams County Department of Emergency Services, 230 Greenamyer Lane, Gettysburg, PA
- August 11 and 12; at the Ramada Inn, 20 Public Square, Wilkes-Barre, PA

Each session will run from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. **Your coverage is invited.**

State Supreme Court Justice Max Baer, a former administrative judge of family court in Allegheny County who is guiding these efforts on behalf of the Supreme Court, said, “With enhanced judicial oversight and strength-based, family-led practices, our overriding goals are to keep children safely in their homes, return others to their homes, and when staying or returning home is not possible, quickly find the best alternative permanent home for every child.”

The August training sessions are the second phase of the Supreme Court’s effort to provide Family Finding training throughout the state. Officials in 14 counties attended phase one training sessions held in September 2008 (*see attached*).

Sandy Moore, Administrator of the Office of Children & Families in the Court (OCFC), said, “Family Finding combines common sense, good social and detective work, and the use of technology to seek out extended family members for dependent children.”

“Early results of this training are very promising,” Moore added. “A review of 40 dependency cases in phase one counties indicated that through Family Finding methods 1767 additional family resources were identified. Of those, approximately 250 became new lifelong connections for the dependent children.”

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Editor’s Note: Background information is attached.

BACKGROUND

The Family Finding training sessions are part of the court's Permanency Practice Initiative (PPI) focusing on three practice areas: Family Finding, Family Group Decision Making and Family Development Credentialing.

Family Finding provides professionals with the tools they need to help find relatives and others committed to a child achieving permanency for every child faster and more efficiently.

Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making process is designed to join the wider family group, including relatives, friends, community members, and others, in collectively making decisions to resolve an identified family concern.

Family Development Credentialing is designed to be an interagency training for staff from all public, private and non-profit service systems. The program teaches the skills to help front line workers become more effective in assisting individuals and families in taking care of themselves and becoming self-sufficient.

Expected outcomes of the initiative are to safely:

- Reduce the number of children adjudicated as dependents and in court-ordered placement
- Reduce the time children spend in the foster care system
- Reduce the number of children who re-enter care
- Reduce the dependency court caseload
- Reduce the cost of children in care
- Reduce the need for residential and institutional placements, and
- Increase child placement stability.

The 13 phase two PPI counties will be enhancing child services and practices, including the implementation of Family Finding, and three-month reviews for every child in the foster care system. Typically court review hearings are held every six months.

In addition, counties are entering all dependency cases into the state's computerized Common Pleas Case Management System Dependency Module, designed to track more than 30 performance measures recommended by the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court, the National Center for State Courts and the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law. The detailed computerized tracking of dependency cases promises to provide vital statistics for the court's efforts to help children and families.

Additional counties will be joining this initiative in 2010, with an expectation that all counties in Pennsylvania will move to this type of Permanency Practice.

In addition to the Permanency Practice Initiative a series of rules changes designed to speed the appellate process for children living in unstable or impermanent homes were implemented by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in March 2009. In June 2009, the Court released a mission statement and set of guiding principles aimed at improving the lives of abused and neglected children whose care is entrusted the child dependency system.

The Supreme Court's efforts are led by Sandy Moore, Administrator of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' OCFC in close partnership with the state Department of Public Welfare's Office of Children, Youth & Families. Additional support and guidance for the initiative is provided by The Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making Statewide Leadership Team, the Statewide Adoption Permanency Network, the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania, and the University of Pittsburgh's School of Social Work and Child Welfare Training Program.

The OCFC, created in October 2006 by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, is funded with federal grants from the Court Improvement Project run by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Permanency Practice Initiative – Phase Two Participants

August 4 and 5: Training Session

Armstrong County
Forest County
Indiana County
Warren County

August 6 and 7: Training Session

Adams County
Clinton County
Cumberland County
Franklin County
Fulton County

August 11 and 12: Training Session

Bucks County
Luzerne County
Montgomery County
Tioga County

Permanency Practice Initiative – Phase One Participants

Allegheny County
Blair County
Butler County
Carbon County
Chester County
Dauphin County
Jefferson County
Lackawanna County
Lehigh County
Northampton County
Snyder County
Venango County
Washington County
York County