

# 2023 Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making Virtual Statewide Conference



**“Partnering with Families for Success”**  
**April 25–26, 2023**





**Mission of Family Group Decision Making Leadership Team**  
**The mission of the Leadership Team is to expand Family Group Decision Making in Pennsylvania while assuring model fidelity.**

**Vision of Family Group Decision Making Leadership Team**  
**The Leadership Team envisions the use of Family Group Decision Making as standard practice across all systems in Pennsylvania.**

**Sponsors: Office of Children and Families in the Courts, Office of Children, Youth and Families, Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center**

*You are invited* to the 2023 Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making Conference presented by the FGDM Leadership Team. The Pennsylvania FGDM Leadership Team is hosting this virtual conference on April 25th and 26th, from 9:00AM to 12:00PM. FGDM is a strength-based model designed to join the wider family group, including relatives, friends, community members, and others, to collectively make decisions to resolve an identified concern. Currently, over 98% of Pennsylvania's counties are utilizing FGDM to engage families in planning and service delivery.

“Partnering with Families for Success” will showcase an array of possibilities for using FGDM with children and their families. Please join us at this event to learn, re-energize, build on your existing strengths, and share ideas with others. The FGDM Leadership Teams looks forward to seeing you there!





## Keynote Speaker – April 25, 2023

### Adrian McLemore

Adrian McLemore has an intimate and deep understanding of the child welfare foster care system. At just six years old, Adrian found himself in a foster home. For the next 12 years, he lived in three states, bouncing between his parents and the system, eventually aging out of foster care. Then at 21, he responded to a call to become a kinship caregiver for his niece and nephew, who were both toddlers at the time. From these experiences, Adrian has become a champion for ensuring young people are part of the child welfare placement conversation. Adrian has taken what is inherently personal for him and made it his life's work. His life's work and mission is to share the knowledge that everyone is a kinship care provider, and we all have a role to play in achieving better outcomes for youth and families.

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## Keynote Speaker – April 26, 2023

### Paul Nixon

Paul Nixon is a registered Independent Social Worker and Specialist in Restorative Child Protection Practices and Leadership, with more than 32 years continuous experience in working in the field. Paul led practice nationally for the Government in New Zealand for 8 years as the longest serving Chief Social Worker. Prior to that he was Director of Children and Families Social Services in North Yorkshire, UK, for 5 years. He has worked in Children Protection Services for 32 years in the UK and NZ, mostly as a senior leader, before setting up his own independent consultancy working internationally. Paul currently works with Government, Community Organizations and Universities in New Zealand, United Kingdom, Europe, USA, Canada and Australia. Paul has written and edited a number of books on social work, empowerment practice and social work with children and families, alongside numerous published articles and chapters. He has provided training, practice and policy consultancy, research and evaluation around many parts of the world.





# SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

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## Tuesday, April 25, 2023

9:00am – 9:30am	<b>Opening Remarks: Leadership and FGDM</b>  <b>Crystal Natan,</b> <i>Executive Director, Lancaster County CYS</i> <i>Co-Chairperson: FGDM Leadership Team</i>  <b>Laval Miller-Wilson, Deputy Secretary,</b> <i>Office of Children, Youth and Families, DHS</i>
9:30am – 10:45am	<b>Keynote Speaker: Adrian McLemore</b>
10:45am – 11:00am	<b>Break</b>
11:00am – 12:00pm	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>

## Wednesday, April 26, 2023

9:00am – 9:30am	<b>Opening Remarks: Leadership and FGDM</b>  <b>Robert Tomassini, Executive Director,</b> <i>Juvenile Court Judges' Commission</i>  <b>Honorable Kevin Dougherty, Justice,</b> <i>Pennsylvania Supreme Court</i>
9:30am – 10:45am	<b>Keynote Speaker: Paul Nixon</b>
10:45am – 11:00am	<b>Break</b>
11:00am – 12:00pm	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>

# Workshop Breakout Sessions

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The following sessions will be offered on both days. When registering, you will be asked to select one workshop for each day attending.

## Breakout Session A

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**Title:** Emergent Practices in Cross-System Collaboration for Family Group Success

**Presenters:** Jennifer Napp Evans, Administrator, Snyder County Children and Youth Services; Samantha Gerdeman, Regional Director, JusticeWorks YouthCare; Jennifer Jones, MH/MR Children's Case Management Supervisor; Susan Jordan, Executive Director, Susquehanna Valley Mediation; and Jennifer Eichenlaub, Judicial Analyst, Office of Children and Families in the Courts.

**Overview:** Learn to effectively partner with families for success and interagency collaboration and coordination across systems. Utilize strength-based family meeting service delivery models for engaging families by eliciting "voice and choice" for solution-focused problem-solving. Overcome concerns and allow children to remain in their homes and communities.

## Breakout Session B

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**Title:** Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) as a Preventative Service

**Presenter:** Carla Clark, FGDM Supervisor, Northumberland County Children and Youth Services

**Overview:** This presentation will discuss how Northumberland County CYS utilizes FGDM for referrals from various systems, including behavioral health, Juvenile Probation, Custody Court, and schools. These referrals assist system partners in empowering families to use their own natural supports and not rely solely on service providers to meet their needs. Implementing FGDM before families become involved with Children and Youth Services adds a layer of prevention services for the families in this county. Attendees will learn FGDM can be successful in varied systems and as a prevention model. Case examples will be provided.

## Breakout Session C

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**Title:** The Strength of Family Finding and Family Group Conferencing as Standard Practice

**Presenters:** Crystal Natan, Executive Director, Lancaster County Children and Youth Services and Patti Noss, President/CEO, It Takes A Village, Inc.

**Overview:** Lancaster County Children and Youth has incorporated Family Finding and Family Group Conferencing as core practices. The leadership team, workers, and the private provider utilize strategies to ensure that Family Finding reports are reviewed as a team. Families then benefit from a Blended Perspective Meeting, Family Group Conference, or Youth Transition Conference on a consistent basis.

## Breakout Session D

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**Title:** Delinquent Children Have Family, Too! Using FGDM for Dually Adjudicated Youth

**Presenters:** Kristi Fields, Deputy Chief of Operations for Adams County Probation Services; Christy R. Stanek, MSW, Deputy Director, Office of Children and Families in the Courts; and Cori Dunn, Esq., Judicial Analyst, Office of Children and Families in the Courts.

**Overview:** In an ever-evolving dependency and delinquency system where challenges like the pandemic bring obstacles such as workforce retention, increases in mental health issues, social isolation, and gaps in educational advancement, we must seek out new ways to help the children and families in our communities struggling to combat these challenges. In this workshop, you will learn how FGDM can be utilized for dually adjudicated dependent and delinquent youth to include family and kin in service planning and delivery. You will learn how to use family and kin throughout various stages of the process to expedite the best possible outcome. With many counties challenged by staff shortages, family and kin can be used as a resource to fill in some of those gaps. You will hear from a Deputy Chief of Operations Probation Officer who has been using family engagement as a strategy with delinquent youth for over 15 years.

## Breakout Session E

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**Title:** Use of FGDM in the Mental Health System and Beyond

**Presenters:** Susan Letera, Director, Lehigh County Integrated Services; Jennifer Clarke-Sirignano, Program Specialist, Lehigh County Integrated Services; Renee Kresge, Regional Director, JusticeWorks YouthCare; and Kerri A. Neipert, Program Specialist, Lehigh County Children and Youth.

**Overview:** This presentation will highlight the successful work in Lehigh County utilizing FGDM within the children's mental health system. In addition to improving services to families, this practice has effectively reduced mental health placements in the child welfare system. It will also include a discussion of plans to expand FGDM into the adult serving system.

## Breakout Session F

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**Title:** Engaging Resistant Families

**Presenter:** Adam Shelp, Case Work Supervisor, Monroe County Children and Youth Services.

**Overview:** This workshop discusses why some clients resist engaging in services, explores core qualities that foster client engagement, and provides an introduction to several evidence-based techniques for engaging involuntary clients.



# REGISTRATION



\*Due to the virtual format of this conference, there will be NO REGISTRATION FEE.

Please register online at: [2023 FGDM Biennial Conference Registration](#)

Deadline for registration is **April 17, 2023**

## **CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS**

Continuing Education credits (CEs) will be available.

Continuing Legal Education credits (CLEs) have been requested.

Continuing Judicial Education credits (CJEs) have been requested.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

All questions regarding the conference should be directed to:  
Diane Litzinger at [Diane.Litzinger@pacourts.us](mailto:Diane.Litzinger@pacourts.us) or (814) 812-6708.

*We look forward to seeing you!*



# Biographies

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**Carla Clark** is the FGDM supervisor at the Northumberland County Children and Youth Services.

Carla has been employed by Northumberland County Children and Youth Services since May 1991. Carla has worked as an adoption worker and termination specialist in the permanency department. She was the liaison for the American Bar Association's Barriers to Permanency Project from 2004 to 2006. Carla was trained as a Family Group Decision Making facilitator and has served in that role since 2005. She has been the FGDM Supervisor since August 2011 and co-chairs the FGDM Statewide Leadership Team.

Carla graduated from Shikellamy School District and the Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania with a bachelor's degree in Social Welfare.

Carla is active in community endeavors, which include serving as a Pre-School Sunday School teacher at Emanuel Bible Fellowship Church, a classroom and team parent for her son's sports teams, and a board member for the Child Protective Services Committee at her church.

**Jennifer Clarke-Sirignano, MSS**, is a Lehigh County Integrated Services Program Specialist. Jennifer has been a practicing social worker for 27 years. She earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology from the University of Maryland and her Master of Social Services from Bryn Mawr College, Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. She continues her professional development by attending trainings and continuing education classes. Jennifer's work experience before joining Lehigh County consists of working at a mental health residential treatment facility for adolescent males and a children's after-school partial program. She joined Lehigh County in 1998 as a resource coordinator and caseworker for Children's Mental Health. Jennifer was the CASSP Coordinator before her current position. The primary focus of her current work includes collaboration and integration of services.

**Cori Dunn, Esq.**, joined the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts in the Office of Children and Families in the Courts as a Judicial Analyst in September 2022.

Prior to her current position, Ms. Dunn acted as a Juvenile Court Hearing Officer in Butler County. In her prior role as a Juvenile Court Hearing Officer, Ms. Dunn heard matters of child abuse and neglect, listened to testimony, gathered evidence, and made court-ordered recommendations for the Court of Common Pleas Judges to review

and approve. In addition, Ms. Dunn was part of a team that implemented the Family Engagement Initiative in Butler County and went on to be a part of the leadership team for the most recent phase of the Family Engagement Initiative counties. Ms. Dunn participated in creating and holding an Enhanced Legal Representation training for Butler County attorneys. Ms. Dunn has attended numerous seminars and conferences held by the Office of Children and Families in the Courts, including Hearing Officer Education seminars, the 2018 Family Group Decision-Making Conference, the 2019 and 2022 Children's Summits, and numerous trainings related to the Family Engagement Initiative. Ms. Dunn was a part of the 2022 Children's Summit planning committee. Before her work as a Juvenile Court Hearing Officer, Ms. Dunn had a private law practice for 12 years, focusing on family law, representing parents in dependency matters.

Ms. Dunn began her education by earning a BA in Professional Writing from LaRoche College and an MA in English from Slippery Rock University. After receiving her master's degree and working for a few years as a professional, she made the decision to go to law school. In March 2004, Ms. Dunn received her law degree from Duquesne University. Prior to opening her own practice in September 2005, Ms. Dunn gained legal experience as a Law Clerk for the Honorable William H. White, Court of Common Pleas of Venango County, and in the Butler County District Attorney's office, where she completed a summer internship during law school.

**Jennifer Eichenlaub** joined the Office of Children and Families in the Courts within the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts as a Judicial Programs Analyst in September 2011.

Prior to her current position, Ms. Eichenlaub was employed by Dauphin County Social Services for Children and Youth as a Program Specialist for the Legal Department (2005-2011). In this capacity, she was responsible for developing procedures and related guidelines for the effective operation of dependency cases. She conducted quality assurance internal audits of legal processes, interpreted agency policies, and procedures to ensure adherence to federal, state, and county laws, rules, and regulations. In addition, she served as a liaison for the Juvenile Judge, Hearing Officers, Guardians Ad Litem, and the Agency Solicitors.

Ms. Eichenlaub holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from St. Mary's College of Maryland, a master's degree in Social Work Administration from Temple University, and a master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix.

**Jennifer Napp Evans** is the Administrator of Snyder County Children and Youth. She has proudly served in this role for the past five years and is also a licensed behavior specialist with the State Board of Medicine.

Jennifer has a heart for children and families, with over two decades of child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health experience. Among her most important credentials is that she is a wife and mother of three amazing children. Jennifer is a servant leader who has proudly led and served her team in achieving great success with the Family Engagement Initiative. She enjoys and embraces the opportunities afforded to her statewide, having served on the Congregate Care Workgroup, Co-chair for the Pennsylvania Children's Leadership Roundtable (8), a member of the PA State Roundtable, and serving on the statewide FGDM and Autism Task Force teams. Jennifer is both humbled and honored to serve as Co-chair of the PA Children's Summit 2024.

**Kristi H. Fields** has been with the Adams County Department of Probation Services for 23 years. She began her career as a Juvenile Probation Officer in 1999. In 2017, she became the Director of the Intake and Administrative Services Unit, supervising the adult and juvenile intake officers, the county and state transfer officers, and the ARD officer. In 2020, she became the Deputy Chief of Operations for Adams County Probation Services. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice from Shippensburg University.

During her time as a Juvenile Officer, she became certified to facilitate Family Group Decision Making in 2004. In this role, she was able to serve the youth and families of Adams County who were not involved in the juvenile justice system. She saw the value in this process and advocated using this with the youth under probation supervision. In 2006 she trained as a facilitator for the Victim/Community Awareness Curriculum (VCAC) because she wanted to bring this curriculum to the juveniles they serve in Adams County. She then became a VCAC train the trainer in 2013 and is currently serving on the Victim Services Committee of the PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. She became a Youth Level of Service (YLS) Master trainer for Adams County in 2012 and continues to provide training to new officers and booster trainings on the YLS.

She serves on the Adams County Children's Roundtable, the Adams County Criminal Justice Advisory Board, and the Adams County Technical Institute Advisory Committee for Criminal Justice.

**Samantha Gerdeman** is the Regional Director at JusticeWorks YouthCare, serving the North Central area of Pennsylvania. Sam has been with JusticeWorks for 12 years, holding positions including Family Resource Specialist, Supervisor, and Program Director, before her promotion to Regional Director in May 2021. Sam was instrumental in the start-up of the JusticeWorks Schuylkill branch as the Program director, which remains the largest branch within JusticeWorks.

Sam has a passion for training and engaging both staff and families and has traveled to different states to promote JusticeWorks YouthCare's "Whatever It Takes" mentality to new and existing staff. Sam holds a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Penn State University and a master's degree in Administration in Human Services from Wilmington University. Sam is also a member of the Penn State Schuylkill Consortium.

**Jennifer Jones** is the current Children's Case Management Supervisor for Behavioral Health/Drug and Alcohol in Columbia, Montour, Snyder, and Union Counties. She has been in this position for the past 21 ½ years. Starting as the Children's Case Manager in 2001, she transitioned into a Children's Case Management Supervisor in 2004. In 2013, she became the CASSP (Children's and Adolescent Service System Program) Coordinator of Columbia, Montour, Snyder, and Union Counties. In 2017, she took on the role of CMSU System of Care Coordinator. She is also the Columbia, Montour, Snyder, and Union Behavioral Health Children's Service Transition Specialist.

**Susan Jordan** is in her 10th year as the Executive Director of Susquehanna Valley Mediation (SVM), a community mediation center serving Union, Snyder, and Northumberland Counties. She is a certified transformative mediator and trainer with the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation. She has degrees in Educational Psychology and Applied Linguistics.

During her tenure at SVM, she has developed collaborations with area Family Courts, Children and Youth Services Agencies, Probation Departments, Community Action Agencies, School Districts, United Ways, and others. She is a member of the 17th and 8th Judicial Districts' Children's Roundtables. She co-chairs a Roundtable Urgency of Awareness Committee on gathering meaningful feedback from families to improve practices in the dependency system and community. She also chairs the regional United Way's Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Her work is rooted in the belief that all people deserve dignity and respect and need self-determination and a sense of belonging to thrive in families and communities.



**Renee Kresge** is the Regional Director at JusticeWorks YouthCare. Renee has been with JusticeWorks since 2007. She is a native of the Lehigh Valley who graduated from Penn State with a degree in Human Development & Family Studies. Renee has more than 25 years of experience providing and managing family-based services. Starting as a clinician, she has successfully adapted to the complex role of Regional Director, balancing quality assurance of services, developing community resources, training, stakeholder relations, and overall management. In 2009 she helped implement the first FGDM program at JusticeWorks and has served as the expert in FGDM for over 20 counties providing FGDM at JusticeWorks. Renee has been part of the Statewide FGDM Leadership Team since 2013. In 2016, she joined the membership committee. Renee also chairs the Eastern Regional Network for FGDM since 2012. In 2013 Renee became the chair of the Lehigh County Children's Roundtable Service Provider Committee. Renee's committed leadership currently manages JusticeWorks programs in Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton, Wayne, Pike, Susquehanna, Wyoming, Columbia, Luzerne, and Lackawanna Counties.

**Susan G. Lettera, MSW**, has been the Director of Lehigh County Integrated Services since 2018. Sue has been a practicing Social Worker for over 35 years. She earned her Bachelor of Social Work, with a Minor in Sociology from Marywood University and her Master's in Social Work from Widener University. She has completed graduate work toward a master's degree in Public Administration from Kutztown University, along with numerous professional training/continuing education classes. For many years, Sue worked in residential/day treatment programs/settings for children and adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities and autism. Beginning in 2001, Sue joined Lehigh County Children and Youth Services staff, where she primarily worked in intake/assessment services and specialized in Family Group Decision Making/Family Finding. Sue was trained by Jim Nice! In 2016, Sue became the CASSP Coordinator for Lehigh County. Sue is an Adjunct Professor/Faculty Liaison at Marywood University's School of Social Work Lehigh Valley MSW Program. She is a member of the Executive Team for Resilient Lehigh Valley and is a Trauma Trainer.

**Crystal A. Natan, MSW, LSW**, is the Executive Director of the Lancaster County Children & Youth Agency. She has served in the capacity for the past 16 years.

Crystal received a BA of Social Work from Millersville University and MSW from Temple University. Crystal began her social work career at the Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency as a casework intern and had the privilege of serving for ten years in various positions. Crystal branched out to enhance her clinical skills and worked in the mental health treatment field for six years with several local community counseling organizations. Ms. Natan returned to the Lancaster County Children & Youth Agency in 2007 as the Executive Director and successfully navigated her organization through the constant evolution of child welfare practice over the past 12 years. Ms. Natan is

most proud of leading her organization to embrace family finding and family group conferencing.

Ms. Natan currently serves on a variety of state and local board and workgroups including President of the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA), PCYA Leadership Academy workgroup (Co-chair), AOPC Autism workgroup, Child Welfare Council, Child Welfare Resource Center Steering Committee, and co-chair of the Family Group Decision Making Leadership Team.

**Kerri A. Neipert, MSW**, is a Program Specialist at Lehigh County Children & Youth Services, where she has been a practicing social worker for 25 years. She earned her Bachelor of Social Work from Kutztown University and her Master's in Social Work from Widener University. She continues to expand her knowledge by attending numerous professional trainings. She regularly participates as a reviewer for the state Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) effort by conducting in-depth case reviews as part of a federal review process of state child welfare systems. Kerri started as an intern at Lehigh County Children and Youth Services in 1997 and, upon graduating in 1998, was hired as a Caseworker. She has experience in the agency as both Caseworker and Casework Supervisor for several units, including Child Protective Services, General Protective Services, and Investigation & Assessments. In 2015 Kerri became a Program Specialist in the Quality Assurance unit, working with contracted service providers, including FGDM providers.

**Patti Noss** is the Owner/Executive Director of It Takes A Village, Inc., which services families in numerous Pennsylvania counties. Patti has extensive expertise in Family Group Conferencing & Family Finding, including the implementation, facilitation, coordination, and training of the model and practice. She has been a member of numerous Pennsylvania counties' Family Group Conference (FGC) Implementation Teams.

Patti founded It Takes A Village, Inc., in June 2005. As the Owner/Executive Director, she oversees a full staff of FGC Coordinators, Facilitators, and Family Finding Specialists. She is part of the PA Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) leadership team that oversees the PA FGDM Statewide Implementation Team. She has been a leader and educator in advancing this practice throughout Pennsylvania. It Takes A Village, Inc., is a Women's Business Enterprise and is (MBE/WBE) certified.

Patti graduated from Shippensburg University in 1983 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Work. She has worked with at-risk youth, women, and families throughout her career. Patti has lived in Dauphin County most of her life, where she enjoys spending time with her family and being actively involved in her community.

**Adam Shelp** is a caseworker Supervisor at Monroe County Children & Youth Services and a graduate student at Marywood University. He has worked in child welfare for ten years.

**Christy R. Stanek, MSW**, joined the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts in the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) as a Judicial Analyst in September 2011. In June 2022, Ms. Stanek was promoted to Assistant Director of OCFC. Ms. Stanek is currently assigned to assist the Kinship Care Taskforce and the State Roundtable's newly convened Autism and the Dependency Courts Taskforce, both led by Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty. Finally, Ms. Stanek oversees the convening of Pennsylvania's Family Group Decision Making State Conference and New Dependency Judge Follow-Up Education Session. Prior to June 2022, Ms. Stanek served as Judicial Programs Analyst working collaboratively throughout Pennsylvania to improve the child dependency system. Ms. Stanek previously led the State Roundtable's efforts to improve Pennsylvania's caseworker retention, responsiveness to trauma, legal representation, transitional youth and visitation. Ms. Stanek also led the creation of the online education module titled, Core I: An Attorneys Introduction to Pennsylvania's Dependency System, which launched in 2022.

Before assuming her current position with the Office of Children and Families in the Courts, Ms. Stanek served as Deputy Administrator for Washington County Children and Youth Services, directly overseeing the agency's court operations, Permanency Practice Initiative, family finding efforts, Family Group Decision Making implementation, quality assurance, and internal training. Ms. Stanek was an original member of the PA FGDM Leadership Team and has done numerous presentations on FGDM, including several for the FGDM International Conference.

Ms. Stanek began her career in child welfare in 1997 and holds a bachelor's degree in Public Administration and a master's degree in Social Work, both from the University of Pittsburgh. In 2017, Ms. Stanek was the recipient of the Youth Advocate Award, presented by the Academy for Adolescent Health, Inc.

