



# System of Care Initiative Family Day Dinner Summary Report

## *Food For Thought*

**T**he DHS Office of Behavioral Health, System of Care Initiative (SOCI), hosted a dinner for System of Care family members on September 21, 2006. SOCI Family Day Dinner attracted more than 70 System of Care families.

This event aimed to promote and encourage parental engagement through frequent family dinners. Participants signed a pledge to eat dinner together with their family, friends and loved ones on Family Day, September 25th, 2006. The University of Pittsburgh, Center for Minority Health (CMH) helped distribute pledge forms to local businesses throughout Allegheny County.

According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University who sponsored the National Family Dinner Day, studies indicate that children and young adults who eat frequent dinners with their families are less likely to smoke, drink and use drugs. In addition, family members who have conversations with children and young adults gain a better understanding of situations that children and young adults are facing.

The dinner included comments from DHS Deputy Director Pat Valentine, OBH, keynote speaker Dawud Akbar, Founder and Director Nzinga Institute, youth and System of Care staff members. Janera Took, youth member from Wilkinsburg and other System of Care staff who shared their experiences of frequent family dinners and the benefit that the dinners provided them. An essay/drawing contest focusing on the importance of family togetherness was held for System of Care children, youth and person in transition ages 6-21.

Children and youth who were judged to have top three essays received gift cards. Similarly, family members had their own contest in which the top three family members who obtained the most number of signed pledge forms received gift cards.

The top three winners for the children/youth essay/drawing contest were: Sharoné Frazier, Felecia McFarlane and Janera Took, all youth from Wilkinsburg. Family members who had the most number of signed pledge forms were Melonie Sandusky

(McKeesport CCF), with a total of 98 signed pledge forms; Marcia Raines (Wilkinsburg CCF & PYT), with a total of 27 pledge forms; and Barbara Witherspoon (Wilkinsburg) with a total of 18 signed pledge forms.

