Ecomap Activity

Creating an ecomap is a graphic and useful way of assessing families in which the families themselves can participate. The assessment process depends upon the mutual engagement and participation of both the Adoption Specialist and the family members. This method of diagramming depicts the family in their dynamic ecological system. Other important systems that influence the family are included in the ecomap. The ecomap also provides a picture of the important nurturing or conflict-laden connections between the family and the world; demonstrates the flow of resources, or lacks and deprivations; and highlights the nature of the interfaces and points of conflicts to be mediated, bridges to be built, and resources to be explored.

The ecomap lends itself to the creativity of the Adoption Specialist and the family. An individual family member or the whole family can be invited to produce the map. The process can be revisited and the map redrawn at various intervals throughout the assessment and matching process to illustrate how the “picture” can change as the family “changes” and at the possible introduction of new members into the family.

Instructions for Ecomapping:

1. Draw a large circle in the middle of the map. This represents the members of household.

2. Inside the large circle, draw a genogram that describes the makeup of the household. It is often useful to add names and ages. Limited space may prevent adding additional descriptive information.

3. Inquire into what outside systems influence the family unit and its members. Examples of these outside systems may include work, extended family, church, school, health care, social welfare, recreation, and friends.
   - Draw smaller circles around the large household circle and label them to represent the outside systems.

4. The next step is to begin to draw the connections of the family unit and its individuals to the various systems in their environment. These connections are indicated by drawing lines between the family and the circles representing the outside systems.
   - Some of the connections may be drawn to the family unit as a whole or to the individual members. This differentiation demonstrates the way the various family members are connected to the environment.

5. Next, indicate the direction of the flow of resources, energy, or interest by drawing arrows along the connecting lines.

6. Finally, write a word or two beside the connecting lines or smaller circles to further describe, clarify or highlight information drawn on the ecomap.
Below, you will find an example of an ecomap and a key to the symbols most commonly used on ecomaps. After you have familiarized yourself with these items, you will have the opportunity to complete an ecomap of your own.

**Relationship Key**
- **Strong**
- **Stressful**
- **Tenuous**
- **Broken/ended**

**Examples of systems**
- Extended Family
- Health Care
- Friends
- Social Welfare
- School
- Culture
- Church
- Work
- Recreation
- Courts
Now it is your turn to create an ecomap. Utilizing the information above, interview a co-worker, friend or family member (or work with another Adoption Specialist to interview a perspective adoptive family).