



Family Group Conferences

In Scotland CHILDREN 1ST has pioneered the use of family group conferences (FGCs) in child welfare and protection since 1998. Today we deliver FGC services, training and consultancy across Scotland in an increasing number of areas.

What is a family group conference?

Family group conferencing draws on the strengths of the wider family and friends in deciding how best to care for a child. The process brings together parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other concerned family members to decide on and take responsibility for a family plan for the care and protection of the child or young person. While the family plan has to be agreed by childcare professionals, the decision-making lies with the family.

How does it work?

An FGC co-ordinator contacts family members and friends who want to be involved with the child. S/he spends time individually with family members to help them push aside the personal feelings they have against each other. They can come together as a family and focus on the child.

The co-ordinator helps the child and each family member to work out and put forward at a family group meeting their views on how best to look after the child.

The family, the co-ordinator and relevant childcare professionals come together for the family group meeting.

Aims of a family group meeting:

- To agree safe and appropriate plans for children
- To encourage family members to participate in planning for the care of children
- To explore options within the family, the community and professional networks
- To encourage partnership between families and professionals
- To empower family members by enabling them to produce plans which meet the needs of their children

“After the meeting I realised that my family do really care and want me to have a happy life.”
Julie (14)

The process of family group conferences

referral and preparation

The co-ordinator meets with the family group and the other participants all agree the points to be addressed by the family plan.



information sharing

The co-ordinator brings together the family and others. Information is shared between the two groups.



private family time

The family group talks things through and makes a plan. The co-ordinator is available to give other information if needed.



the plan

The family, co-ordinator and other participants come together again. The plan is discussed and agreed. Ways to monitor the plan are agreed.

FGCs are suitable for all types of intervention, for example if a child is at risk of abuse or neglect, has major difficulties in school arising from family issues, has a disability or has been, or is likely to be, referred to the Children's Reporter, or is at risk of being accommodated.

Case Study

Julie (14) was living with a short-term carer and at risk of being in care on a permanent basis as no-one in her family seemed willing to look after her. Mum had a drug habit and couldn't care for her; Dad had a new family and does not want to be involved. She had little contact with the rest of her family. She did not think her family would come to a meeting to make decisions about her care.

The Co-ordinator spent time contacting and speaking with Julie's family – 13 family members and friends, including Mum, come along.

The Co-ordinator also spent time with Julie in advance of the meeting, to help her crystallise her views on what she wanted to happen. At the meeting we read her views out to her family: she accepts that she cannot live with Mum or Dad, but wants contact with family

members; she enjoys staying with the carer.

With help from the Co-ordinator, and information from professionals attending, the family were able to come together to discuss and plan for Julie's care. As a result of the meeting Julie re-established contact with Grandparents and an Aunt who offered to care for Julie.

The short-term plan is for shared care of Julie by the carer and her Aunt. The longer-term plan is for her Aunt to secure a bigger house to accommodate Julie.

Julie stood a foot taller after her meeting, pleased and relieved that there is another chance for her to remain within her family and not move to permanent foster care.

Training and Consultancy

CHILDREN 1ST has established a Family Group Conference Development Unit to promote the use of conferencing across a wide range of need and to develop best practice guidance. Drawing on our experience of delivering FGC services across Scotland, we offer consultancy and training to anyone wishing to develop FGC services in their area.

For further information about CHILDREN 1ST and to order any of our publications, please contact:
CHILDREN 1ST, 83 Whitehouse Loan, Edinburgh EH9 1AT
Tel: 0131 446 2300 Fax: 0131 446 2339
E-mail: info@children1st.org.uk
Web: www.children1st.org.uk