The 6th Annual
European Family Group Conference Network meeting

20 – 22 November 2008
Glasgow, Scotland

Hosted by

The Network
The European FGC Network is a group of countries in Europe (including Russia) who are involved in, or interested in, Family Group Conferencing.

The Event
This annual event was first hosted by England in 2003, and has since been hosted by Belgium (2004), Wales (2005), Denmark (2006) and Germany (2007). At the end of each annual meeting delegates choose the host country for the next year. At the meeting in Berlin delegates chose Scotland to host the 2008 meeting.

As the lead provider of FGC services and development in Scotland, CHILDREN 1st co-ordinates the Scottish FGC Network and also takes the lead role in Scotland’s involvement in the European FGC Network. CHILDREN 1st therefore hosted the 2008 meeting on behalf of Scotland and the Scottish FGC Network.

The annual European FGC Network meeting is very much about networking, sharing practice, ideas and research, finding common solutions to common problems, learning from and encouraging each other, and celebrating successes.

10 countries were represented at the network meeting in Glasgow: Austria, England, Germany, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Scotland, Slovakia, and Wales. Apologies were received from five countries: Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Russia, Sweden. France has previously attended network meetings, although they do not use FGCs, however we did not receive a response from our contact in France regarding this network meeting.
To open the meeting each country gives a brief update. The 2008 country updates are contained below:

**Country Updates**

**Austria**

FGCs don’t exist at present in Austria. Austrian representatives were present at the meeting to gather information from other countries in the hope of implementing FGCs in the future.

**England**

England has in excess of 80 projects/services varying greatly in size and number of referrals. Changes in Government policy has led to FGCs being recommended prior to and during public law proceedings which has led to an increase in the number of referrals in existing projects, an increase in the complexity of cases and the emergence of a number of new projects. Accreditation is being pursued via a partnership between FRG and the University of Chester (and for some projects through the open college network).

**Germany**

The territory of Germany covers 357,021 km² and counts over 82 million inhabitants, it has the largest population of any member state of the European Union, 22 persons/q km.

Average population density is about 230 people per square kilometre, but population distribution is very uneven. In the former West Germany, population density is 267 people per square kilometre, compare with 140 people per square kilometre in the former East Germany. Berlin and the industrialized Ruhr Valley are densely populated, while much of the Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania regions in the East are thinly populated. These disparities have been exacerbated by migration from East to West, as former Easterners have sought better employment opportunities. Germany is home to the third-largest number of international migrants worldwide, about 10 million or 12% of the population of Germany. The largest group (2.7 million) is from Turkey, and a majority of the rest are from European states such as Italy, Serbia, Greece, Poland, and Croatia.

**Overview**

In October the second German Network meeting with 107 participants from around 18 different cities and regions, from Nordfriesland in the north to Rosenheim in the south, from 11 of 16 states all over Germany was held in Berlin. There were social workers, coordinators and people from interested universities. Compared to the network meeting in Cardiff 2005, when we first met and when we were still seeking for “the others” we achieved a lot.
FGC practice in Germany had a very wide range in meanings of the form of organization, status of the project, funding, etc.:
There are Cities where you will find only single (brave) persons, ex. Rosenheim where one person facilitates FGC’s within the social services of the city or there are regions with well organized “small networks” such as Berlin.
We had two major projects from 2006 / 2007 / 2008 in Münster and Berlin which showed good results.
So far we realized around 100 FGC’s (there are no really checked out figures for the whole country).
Mr. Früchtel and Mr Budde provided us with interesting thoughts to the theoretical background of FGC’s in the context of life world systems (as you man remember from Berlins meeting last year)
In summary: We are still at the beginning of the introduction of FGC’s in Germany and we are working hard to keep on moving.

Challenges
The biggest challenge is still to promote the idea, win social workers and politicians for the idea.
For the cities which took part in the “bigger” projects the challenge is mainly to integrate FGC in everyday work – to keep it going on.
For the smaller ones it is to get the possibility for a bigger project.

Funding
There are several models of funding, mostly depending on special funding for projects; some are working integrated in their usual work or being paid as casual workers.

Issues
While we are moving forward with the implementation of FGC’s there is a broad variety of issues:
From: How to start, whom to win, where to find the money …
To questions like: How to participate children and young people, how to prepare the experts?
One big issue was “child protection”: - is it effective to use FGC’s and if yes, are there special questions arising. How to insure safety for everyone, whom to exclude … Other issues are the training of the coordinators, the use in other fields (elderly), the coordination with the juvenile justice model, questions about the long term effects of FGC? Or the discussion around the question if it is better to train lay people or better using specialists.

Usage
FGC’s are used in the youth welfare system, care and protection as well as in a project for youths dropping out of school called “Second chance”. It is also used in foster care and as “Restorative Justice Conference” in youth justice.

Networks
The National FGC network meeting is now established and we are trying to create more structure to keep the information flowing and handle the growing community of interested people.

Evaluation
The bigger projects were well evaluated, with positive outcomes that were communicated. In the smaller ones we are mostly only counting some figures like participants, time, parts of the plan …
Perspektive
The next year we are looking forward to the:
• Transfer into everyday’s work in the cities where the projects are finished,
• a project in Stuttgart,
• the broader implementation in Berlin,
• the start of the first German trainings,
• may be a documentary!

Netherlands

The Netherlands have held nearly 2000 FGCs and are using them in social care, youth justice, schools and community conferencing. Each of the 12 regions of the country has a region manager who leads a group of sessional FGC co-ordinators. They are pioneering the use of a webpage for family members which is opened by the co-ordinator at the beginning of the FGC process and can then be accessed by family only once the FGC is over. This is an informal way of family members monitoring their plans and will be operational in 2009.

Northern Ireland

My name is Jen Simpson and I am delighted to be here in Glasgow, representing both the Western Health & Social Care Trust as a FGC Manager and the Northern Ireland FGC Forum as an Executive Member. I would like to introduce my two colleagues; Jenny McLaughlin, who manages the service for the South Eastern & Belfast Trusts and is also a member of the NI FGC Executive Forum; and Donal Heaney, a Family Group Conference Co-ordinator with me in the Western Trust.

Overview
Northern Ireland is a small country within the UK, together with Scotland, England and Wales. Like Scotland, we have the power now to elect our own devolved government and to run it, we get an annual allocation of money from the central government in London. Although, it is early days in the life of our regional assembly, it feels much better to have local politicians, elected by us and answerable to our population for how the money is spent and how policies are put into action.

Northern Ireland has a population of 1.6 million and until two years ago, under direct rule from London, had a large number of local authorities. Now these have been reduced to five Health and Social Care Trusts and shortly there will be one overall Regional Health & Social Care Authority instead of four.

There is a Family Group Conference Service covering each of these local Trust areas.

I have managed the service in the West since it was set up in 2006 and it continues to expand and meet the needs of the whole area. All of the services mentioned are in the domain of child welfare. (Although there is an exciting new development just emerging in the field of
Mental Health.) The service in the Southern part of Northern Ireland, is provided by Barnardos, a voluntary, UK national organisation, respected for its innovative work. The FGC Manager there has used Family Group Conferencing in relation to domestic violence (Safety Conferencing) to care leavers (Network Conferencing), young homeless people and has used restorative practice in relation to children’s residential settings.

In Northern Ireland, there is also the Youth Justice Agency, set up by the Northern Ireland Office, the Department which is responsible for justice and policing (not yet devolved by the London government). There are teams of Youth Conference Co-ordinators covering all of the region, using restorative practice for children and young people involved in offending. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is also interested in using restorative approaches in combating crime and anti-social behaviour among young people. (Ref. Thompson Best & Mena Wilson, Report to the New Zealand International Conference, 2006).

Work of the Northern Ireland FGC Forum
I believe that all the FGC Managers for Trusts/Barnardos owe a great deal to the work of this body which was formed eleven years ago. I have valued greatly the support, guidance, encouragement and nurturing provided since I first got involved five years ago. Setting up a new service is very exciting, but equally can be very challenging, lonely and such hard work!! (Jenny)

The Forum in made up of people who embrace the vision to see “FGC and restorative approaches underpin and influence all aspects of work with children, young people, families and communities.”

The Forum exists as a network to exchange information, share ideas, promote good practice, provide training, encourage research, to lobby and to influence policy. Membership is multi-disciplinary and as a body it is keen to form national and international alliances. To this end, subgroups exist and emerge in response to our rapidly changing environment, e.g. Conference Planning Subgroup, Good Practice Subgroup, Training and Accreditation Subgroup and currently two new groups; Lobbying and Restorative Practices are being formed. Last year, to celebrate our ten years’ anniversary, we held an international conference, ‘Because Families Matter’. As part of that we had the opportunity to host a meeting with representatives from Scotland, England and Ireland (unfortunately Wales were unable to attend by expressed a desire to do so), which has been christened the ‘Five Nations Meeting’. It was agreed we had a lot to share and develop together, e.g. accreditation of training for co-ordinators and engagement in a debate on agreed National Standards to secure the FGC Model in its pure form throughout Britain and Ireland. In the New Year, the Forum plans to hold a workshop to progress this idea.

Earlier this year, we were excited when representatives from the Executive Committee of the NI FGC Forum were invited to meet with senior officials from the Department of Health & Social Services to discuss how Family Group Conferencing could be used as part of the governmental strategy to keep children and young people supported within their family network and community, as opposed to State care. This policy is outlined in ‘Care Matters’ – A Bridge to a Better Future (2007). The Department subsequently showed their commitment to the use of Family Group Conferencing by making recurrent money available to invest in resources for children in need of support and protection, children in State care and young people leaving care. They also set targets for Trusts to meet in response to the funds allocated, thus creating a powerful impetus to encourage more referrals by Social Workers.
The targets have created challenges to FGC Service Managers but on the whole have helped to put Family Group Conferencing on the map.

In addition, for the first time government directed that Trusts should come together to produce Regional Guidelines on the use of Family Group Conferencing to ensure that all were operating in the same way. This enables government to monitor activity levels and outcomes – all of this has helped those of us, who believe in the power and creativity of families to be assured that Family Group Conferencing is here to stay!! In short, this has been a very productive year when Family Group Conferencing steadily has become more embedded in the mainstream of child welfare work.

Norway

Overview

In administrative terms, Norway (4.5 million people) consists of 19 counties with a total of 430 municipalities. The responsibilities and duties of the child protection authorities are set out in the Norwegian Act relating to Child Welfare Services of 17 July 1992, no. 100. The municipalities and central government have separate duties and responsibilities in the area of child protection. According to the above-mentioned act, all municipalities shall have a child protection service that ensures that the day-to-day work is carried out in pursuance of the law. The municipal child protection authorities’ responsibilities include giving advice and guidance, investigating specific matters, making decisions in accordance with the law, and effectuating measures to alleviate the situation of children experiencing difficulties. The state is divided into five child protection regions and its duties include assisting the municipalities’ child protection authorities with placing children in care, assisting the municipalities with recruiting and arranging foster homes and managing residential care. In Norway, the central government’s child protection authority has been given responsibility for assisting the municipal child protection services take into use the family group conference model. Family group conferences are usually held in connection with implementing auxiliary measures as defined in the Child Welfare Act.

A national implementation plan with a time frame from 2007 to 2012 has been drawn up. In addition, national and regional annual performance indicators have been outlined for the nationwide family group conference initiative. The plans are to ensure that all the 430 municipalities in Norway are offered instruction in the use of family group conferences. So far more than 150 municipalities have received such training, but training does not always lead to implementation. In 2008 350-400 family group conferences took place.

Challenges

Considerable time often elapsed from the moment the municipalities decided to participate in the family group conference training until they actually carried out their first family group conference.

As the model becomes more widespread there is a greater likelihood of the model being modified and, ultimately, changing completely. Elisabeth Backe Hansen (researcher) has pointed out the potential question of whether the method should be retained in its original form or whether it should be adapted to the national context where it is being applied. Although the case officers stick to the principles of the model, personal factors will inevitably lead to a degree of local variation.
Norway believe that applying family group conferences from within a national Directorate is the most advantageous solution. Although this may entail some delays, there are greater chances of success than if the implementation task is allocated to an organisation outside of the child protection services.

**Funding**
Unlike in our neighbouring countries, on the basis of the research results the Norwegian Ministry for children and equality decided to implement family group conference in all the country’s municipalities. The Ministry has so far earmarked funds to co-ordinate the implementation and the quality assurance of family group conferences. The governmental implementation team consists of six persons. In addition to a national co-ordinator for family group conferences at the directorate, there is a regional family group conference co-ordinator in each of the five regions.

**Usage**
Mainly Child Welfare Services
Expanding to new areas outside child welfare
NGO

**Research**
Two doctoral theses have been written about family group conferences in Norway. Both consider children’s participation in family group conferences (Horverak 2006 and Strandbu 2007). There are some ongoing projects at the moment.

**Proud of**
It has been decided to implement family group conferences in all of Norway’s municipalities. This will take time, and a strategy has been prepared to achieve this goal. Implementation in the new municipalities must be gradual and paced so that there are adequate resources to follow up progress in the municipalities once they have been trained. By 2012 all municipalities in the country shall have received an offer of training in the method.

**Focus on children’s participation**

**Networks**
International ties are important for Norway
Sweden, Denmark and Norway meet once-twelce a year.

**Issues**
Most models are developed further, and this must also be the case for the family group conference model. Unless it is to become a marginalised model, adjustments to Norwegian conditions and a clear definition of the model’s application and principles are the only viable road. Instead of calling this a dilution of the underlying ideas, this can be understood as a further development leading to an expanded scope for the model. An example of this is the development of children’s participation that took place during the national project, and that continues to be an overall focus in Norway.
Poland

The ‘Hope for Families’ foundation in Poland is implementing FGCs in 16 provinces. This organisation also offers advice, information and training on FGCs and also act lobby the Polish Government. Poland is planning an FGC conference and would like other European nations to be represented at this.

Scotland

Overview

- 32 local authority (LA) areas in Scotland.
- CHILDREN 1ST is currently providing FGC services in 13 LA areas, with two more starting in 2009, and two more in consultation.
- Three LAs provide their own FGC service, one is a well established and growing service, one is a pilot service with consultation and advice from CHILDREN 1ST. One charity organisation is providing a FGC service in its LA area.

Challenges

- FGC has been strongly promoted in recent Government strategy, but there is a risk of it being diluted in the policy and guidance that comes out of this strategy (and this has already happened?).
- Some FGC services are well established (have been operating for some time) yet they are not growing – no money being given for expansion. This questions the LAs commitment to the FGC way of working.
- We are still having to convince people that FGC works!!!
- Accreditation for co-ordinator training – challenge in finding a balance between a professional and an academic qualification.
- Some LAs trying to provide FGC services or do FGCs with short-cuts (not wanting to put in the necessary time, money, training, resources; i.e. not really following the principles of FGC).

Research

- Family Plans research in three LAs.
- Still would like research on longer term outcomes.

Issues

- Ongoing investigation into ‘Significant pieces of work’ (when the co-ordinator works with a family but a FGC meeting or review is not held), how do we record this and recognise the changes that have happened within the family and/or the impact the processes has had on a family? (Another understanding of this phrase is when a co-ordinator spends a ‘significant’ amount of time working with a family but a FGC meeting or review is not held. This is different, but still needs to be looked at).
- Timescales – how long does it take to get a referral to a meeting or review? Is our general figure of 6-8 weeks still accurate? How much actual time is spent on each case?
- Case loads – how many FGCs/reviews can we expect a co-ordinator to do in a year?
Sessional versus full-time/part-time co-ordinators – what are the pros and cons? How can this best work for employers and the families we work with?

Proud of
Scottish FGC Network, for anyone interested in FGC in Scotland. Officially launched this year, and the website will soon be available. Our 2nd annual meeting in August successfully brought together interested people from throughout Scotland. Lots of good discussion was had about issues, and lots of partnerships strengthened; it really is developing as a ‘network’.
Scottish FGC Network website – available soon! Plus our updated CHILDREN 1ST website (also available soon).
CHILDREN 1ST FGC co-ordinator training will be accredited by Robert Gordon University (RGU) as of the new academic year (2009). This will be a Graduate Certificate in FGC worth 60 credits.
Growth in Scotland. FGC is available in more LAs than ever before, and some are growing (taking on more staff!). Plus service provision is being taken up by LAs and charity organisations, as well as the principles increasingly informing people’s practice.
FGC staff in Scotland – they are all great!
This year we celebrated 10 years of FGC in Scotland.

Usage
FGC is used differently in each LA in Scotland, from preventative to high tariff cases. Some areas have money for specific issues, such as substance misuse. Two LAs have mandatory referrals.

Slovakia

Overview
The Smile as a Gift is an NGO which is active in the field of social protection of children, institutional and foster care and in the work with families in crisis. With its motto “…so that every child has a family” it promotes the family protection and the value of the family. There are 8 regional branches in Slovakia. The FGCs tends to become another pillar in its work.

Challenges
The biggest challenge in the field of the FGCs in Slovakia is implementation. It involves several steps:
1. Implementation of the standards: Renewal of the national standards to implement the FGCs properly. To do this, we must redefine the procedural management in our regional branches.
2. Regional FGC managers are needed to implement the FGCs. They should be the engines to promote, manage and lead the FGCs. They should be coordinators themselves.
3. Recruiting, selection, education and leading of the coordinators.
4. Persuasion of the authorities, that the FGCs work. The authorities are skeptical, if this will work in Slovak culture.
Issues
Looking into the future, FGC could be made in the future a regular, though yet not mandatory, part of the planning process: the legislation at the moment states that a plan for the child has to be made, but do not specify how. The FGC could be used in that phase in the future, if the authorities would accept it.

Funding
Corporal funding ( Provident Financial), local grants (local authorities), proposal for governmental funding to finance the regional FGC managers.

Usage
Families, who are cared by social workers of the Smile as a gift (especially within the project: Complex social work with children with behavioral problems and their families, supported by the EEA grants).
Families referred by local and regional authorities and institutions.

Networks
The Smile as a gift has a very good relationship and co-operation with governmental authorities and local and regional basis. We spread the idea of co-operation with organization working with families through our regional conferences Bridges towards family and on daily basis.

Next year
Implementation of the FGCs at the regional level should include 4 steps:
1. National guidelines (redefinition)
2. Regional managers (recruiting, training, leading)
3. Training of coordinators. Accreditation of the training.
4. Promotion, partnership with national, regional and local governments.

Wales
Overview
The first FGC service in Wales was commissioned by Gwynedd local authority in 1991. FGC or FGM as it is called in Wales has steadily grown since that time and today there are services in 18 out of the 22 local authority areas.
Services are either internal local authority services or are commissioned by the LA to voluntary and charitable organisations by way of a service level agreement or a spot purchase arrangement.
Most services are receiving referrals in excess of the amount of funding they receive. As most services are funded by the LA they are unable to accept self referrals meaning that in these areas only families involved with the authority are able to access a service.

Challenges
Providing services in very large rural areas is always a challenge, practically and financially. We continue to try to ensure that the ethos and principles of FGC are being upheld and that all families should have the opportunity to access a service when required.
Most services have or are developing structures in order to facilitate the involvement of children/young people or families in the development of services.
Services have a perpetual need to secure funding.

**Funding**
Most services in Wales receive funding from their social services department; many of the charities who offer a service also provide some funding of their own. Some services access some funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. Accessing sufficient funding continues to be one of the greatest challenges faced by services.

**Research**
In June of this year Children in Wales published their findings regarding a mapping exercise of all FGC services currently being delivered across Wales. This can be accessed from their website. [www.childreninwales.org.uk](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk)

**Usage**
Most services are only able to offer an FGC to families where the child has been assessed by the local authority as either a child in need or where there are child protection concerns. These are funded by the local authority. Services which do not rely solely on this funding appear to have more flexibility.

Examples of usage are:

- Where there is a risk of a child being taken into care
- Where there are education issues, including the risk of a child being excluded from school
- Where there is a risk of a child losing a placement with a foster carer
- Where there are health issues or concerns (including substance misuse)
- Where it is proposed a child is to be placed for adoption
- Where court proceedings are pending
- Where there is risk of offending or a child has been involved in offending behaviour
- Where there are housing issues and concerns about where a child will live
- To make contact plans for LAC to see their family
- To make arrangements to return a child to their birth family
- Where there is a risk of a family becoming involved in family court proceedings
- Where there are domestic abuse issues within the family

**Networks**
The All Wales network continues to meet on a regular basis, numbers attending has risen this year. The North and the South also meet regularly as an exchange of practice. This is seen by all as excellent support and professional development.

**Next year**
The All Wales network is currently arranging a conference to be held in summer next year. This will be held in Cardiff with the aim of engaging the Welsh Assembly Government and professionals who are potential referrers in order to raise the profile of FGM and to spread the word!
Country updates (from countries who were not present at the meeting)

Denmark

We are now in a positive progress with the project on FGC in minority families and are now focusing on two new items, which are new to us:

1. To work in groups with parents to maladjusted children and young people from a FGC - perspective. Parallel the children and the young people are involved in groups.

2. FGC in Youth Justice.

We are still practicing FGC with homeless people, young persons with learning difficulties and people who suffer from psychiatric difficulties.

Finland

A new publication (in Finnish) on FGC in the capital area has seen day light. It is not just a project report but more experiences in implementation and in challenges. Juha-Pekka Vuorio nad Salla Hänninen from the project and professor Erja Saurama have edited the publication. That tells us: FGC is still alive in this area.

Overview

FGC is well known. It is used around the country, locally, now and then. The usage is totally dependent on the municipalities and on the social workers.

The coordination has been weak lately (there is no resp. organisation).

Networks

FGC is mainly seen and positioned in network contexts - and promoting the child.

Proud of

FGC - especially working with the larger family - is implemented in law this year. In Finland the child protection law was renewed (came into force in 2008) and in the preamble texts, FGC is presented. The paragraph follows the Swedish example. It (Section 32) is titled as "Charting out the child's family network":

Before the child is placed outside the home, it should be investigated whether the parent with whom the child does not primarily reside, relatives or other persons with close personal links with the child can take the child to reside with them or otherwise participate in supporting the child. The investigation need not be made if it is deemed unnecessary due to the urgency of the case or for another justified reason. Issues concerning the child's place of residence and placement shall always be resolved in the child's best interest.
Input from speakers
One the first day of the meeting two sessions were provided with input from speakers:

- James Cox shared briefly about current work of the Scottish Government in relation to FGC and more generally in the field of work with children and families (including GIRFEC – Getting it Right for Every Child, a national programme which promotes a shared approach that aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people);

- Joy Brodie shared briefly about FGC in Fife – the partnership between CHILDREN 1ST and the local authority, the implementation of their mandatory referral procedure, and some of the outcomes they have already seen. Here are the details Joy shared:

FGC in Fife: 2001 - 2008

- 2001/2 Pilot Project, North East Fife (and CHILDREN 1ST)
- 2003 Service for 5 Child and Family Teams
- 2004 Roll Out to 9 Teams (Optional Referral to FGC)
- 2004 Consultancy and Report
- 2005 Restructure of Child and Family Teams (there are now 15 teams)
- 2006 Service Manager Remit
- 2007 Referral became Mandatory (April 1st)

Fife: Growth of FGC Service

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<td>2007/8</td>
<td>248</td>
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* Referral is through Child and Family Teams

Mandatory Referral
- Commitment to the values and principles
- Positive Outcomes
- Evidence shows that when the model remains voluntary on an ‘opt-in’ basis, it is not adopted universally
- Fits with the Social Work Service longer-term strategy - changing the balance of our services
- Aim to maintain more children with families and in the community:
  » Growth of Kinship Care
  » Increase family support
  » More flexible care packages
Criteria for Referral
• Children aged 10 and under who are at risk of being accommodated by the local authority;
• Children aged 10 and under who have been accommodated in an emergency;
• Children aged 10 and under where permanency planning is needed.

Outcomes – children at risk of being accommodated by the local authority
38 children involved in FGCs; follow up at 3, 6 and 12 months
Risk of child being accommodated (as measured by social work):
At 3 months: 2 children had decreased risk
At 6 months: 7 children had decreased risk, 12 children had the same risk, and 6 children had increased risk (5 from one family)
At 12 months: 4 children had decreased risk
Placements:
All children placed either with their original parent carer or with relatives one child moved from a parent to a relative

Data not available for 6 children

Outcomes – accommodated children
12 children involved in FGCs; follow up at 3 months and 6 months
Risk of child remaining accommodated (as measured by social work):
At 3 months: 2 children had the same risk of remaining accommodated, 2 had decreased risk
At 6 months: 3 children had decreased risk, 1 child had the same risk, and 3 children had increased risk
Placements:
At 3 months: 1 child with foster carers, 2 children with relatives
At 6 months: 7 children with foster carers, 2 children with relatives

Data not available for 1 child

Permanency Planning
14 children involved in FGCs; follow up at 3, 6 and 12 months
Likelihood of child being placed permanently outwith the family (as measured by social work):
At 3 months: 2 children remained at same risk, 4 children had decreased risk
At 6 months: 8 children had decreased risk
At 12 months: 1 child had decreased risk
Placements:
At 3 months: 1 child with a relative, 1 child with a parent
At 6 months: 7 children with relatives, 4 children in foster care
At 12 months: 1 child with relative

In 3 cases children moved from foster care to relatives and in a further case one child went from foster care to parents.
Open Space Technology is the usual method employed for discussion and sharing in these annual meetings, and was used again this year to good effect. Delegates were asked to provide topics / questions / ideas for discussion, which were then grouped into themes. Nine themes were identified and discussed over a number of sessions, with people free to move between discussion groups as and when they wish. Summary of discussion are contained below:

**Theme: Core Values**

Need to re-state them – can’t assume they are understood or accepted by everyone

**What are they?**
- Preparation
- Voluntary nature
- Independence of co-ordinator
- To use *trained* co-ordinators
- Referrer to agree plan if it is safe
- Neutral venue
- Private family time
- Co-ordinators creating a space for the voice of family and child

**Inclusion**
- Family is owner of the process and plan
- Having children at their own meeting

Debate about do co-ordinators need qualifications – other than co-ordinator training?
- Is it being professionalised?
- The interview / training process is crucial
- Good to have a mix of people
- Need a strong national organisation with standards and regional networks
- Supporting people to stick to values
- Needs a clear national understanding of the model
- Supporting emerging projects – need to keep in touch more; use of resources e.g. toolkit; regional and national networks

**Theme: Research / Evaluation / Outcomes**

Too big a subject to discuss in depth!!

**What is being measured / what has been measured**
- Satisfaction with process
- Sticking to the model
- Outcomes – statistical, e.g. LAC numbers, CP numbers; softer (anecdotal – interview based)
- Involvement of fathers
- Involvement of wider family (compared with pre-FGC)
How
Scaling – interviews pre and post FGC with family / children, with referrers
Always involved an academic / university – plus significant worker time

Questions we asked
Who is the evaluation for – who benefits?! –family; -projects; -funding.
In which phases of implementation does evaluation take place?
How often – is continuous evaluation necessary?

Ideas
Measurement of involvement of males in plan – do they play an active part in plan implementation?
International comparative studies – comparing evaluations

Please could recent research be made available or signposted?!!

Theme: Service Users

Ask them for feedback
Communication via website
Use the person who attended FGCs to explain – in person / written / DVD. Users train professional in the working of FGC
Using family members in interviews
Leaflets for youngsters and others for parents / other family members
Some people cannot write or read, so you must realise that and phone them
Leaflets with pictures can be helpful
Men like FGCs because they are asked for, involved. Grandfathers the same (social workers do not invest in men ….)
Families don’t want to engage – because they don’t have enough information; co-ordinator can explain; tell them that you don’t work for social work
To speak the same language is helpful
To have men co-ordinators is helpful
Ask people what kind of co-ordinator would fit best

How you can help them: (convince)
- story about other people
- what do you want in future for your family?
- research – information
- if you don’t want social workers in your life, try your own plan by making via FGC
- use the same level of language (so that they understand what you mean)
- by having them tell their story (to find out what they want to achieve)
- encouraging them
- communication is main issue (safe). Confidence is important.
- it feels good to get support
- explain your level of involvement (if you are commissioned by social services)
Theme: Training

England
Basic / Fundamental – some is accredited via FRG; - Module 1
3 day training:
- values / principles
- co-ordinator role
- history of FGC
- model
- research
- role of referrer and others
- role of plan – FGC
- vulnerable adults
- voice of child
- advocacy / support
- review process
In some new projects – training has been used as part of selection process – discussion / self-selection

Ongoing co-ordinator development through projects, e.g. every 2 months, and through regions every 3 months.
Additional required training for Domestic Abuse.
Some have checklists to help evidence values / practice (e.g. Daybreak project)

Netherlands
Basic – very similar to England – 3 days for co-ordinators
For referrers / others – 1 day
4 times per year – co-ordinator days – peer learning – requirements to attend at least 2 per year to keep certificate
1 time per year large study day

Also – requirement to shadow co-ordinator through FGC process and meeting (request of families – not imposing) (module 2).
Then very supported through first FGC process (module 3)

Co-ordinator recruitment via training.
“Recruit in haste … repent at leisure!!”  The success / reputation of projects / services depends on co-ordinator skills – choose wisely!

Co-ordinators often value being observed – feedback. Need to demonstrate ongoing reflective practice

In England some projects have minimum number of referrals self-employed co-ordinators should take to ensure ongoing practice, e.g. 6 per year.

In Netherlands - minimum of 1 - maximum of 3 - FGCs per year, because don’t want practice to become ‘routine’

England / Netherlands – social workers practicing for agencies cannot be co-ordinators, as potential conflict of interest.
Co-ordinator – ongoing training – topics e.g. working with professionals; engaging families; managing conflict

Theme: **Mandatory**

Mandatory – NO

Duty of local authority to let family know of FGC
Identify difference of “being offered an FGC” and “being encouraged to have an FGC”
Definition of “mandate”
Mandate would push the local authority to use FGC:
   ? if became mandatory it would become the same as child protection case conference.
   Important for family to have to power to decide
What way is FGC offered to families? Families need to have the right to be able to refer themselves.
Mandate does not work if it is a duty for the family.

Needs systems and checks if referral is mandatory – to make sure it is happening.
Who offers the FGC?
   - worker? (social worker) –Kent local authority has a statement that worker reads
   - co-ordinator?
It should be a right for families. Who enforces this?
Needs to be equity of access – rather than referrers doing the gatekeeping

Theme: **Implementation**

How long did it take? Challenges?
- it is a process
- varies from one project to another
- network with other projects that have already started
- be clear on the ideas you have
- enthusiasm, commitment, vision. → identify champions
- process keeps evolving
- build on every experience
- be patient, don’t lose sight of the goalpost
- get the population to know about it and demand it
- decision-makers need to know about FGCs (judges, councillors, MPs, etc)
- influence political opinions by highlighting that this is a RIGHT!!!

Threats?
- compromising FGC ethos (shortcuts), e.g. no private family time
Theme: Co-ordinators

Sessional vs Permanent

Strengths - (sessional)
Flexible
Time
Value for money (< overheads)
Motivation
Having choice – diversity needs; - different backgrounds

Weaknesses - (sessional)
But additional costs – training
Lose after spending on training
Can you guarantee to deliver with sessionals
Permanent – want job security
Performance management

Opportunities - (both)
Diversity – fresh thinking
Career progression

Threats
Perceived as being lesser (sessional)
Time scales longer? (sessional) (part time)
System needs in competition

Each brings something

Payment – conference payment or hourly payment

Tax issues

Theme: Accreditation

England and Wales:
Different levels for programmes
Different subjects covered
Expense – especially for session
Currently pilots

Don’t take for granted that the core values are there
Theme: Use of technology

“e-power” – Netherlands
Using a website throughout the FGC process. Boxes on the front page of the website include:
- question / plan
- photo
- webcam chat box
- forum
- agenda and reminder
- actions
- diary

Kent (England): focus group to improve website

Cwlwm (Wales): young persons’ user group recently developed webpage

CHILDREN 1st (Scotland): upcoming Scottish FGC Network website will have a chatroom / discussion forum for users / members
Next Year
Delegates at this meeting chose Poland to host the 7th annual European FGC Network meeting in 2009. It is likely to be held in October. Dates and details will be available nearer the time. As always, five places will be allocated to each country. These will be allocated by the link person for each country.

Thank You from Scotland!
On behalf of the Scottish FGC Network and CHILDREN 1ST, thanks to everyone who attended and contributed to the 6th annual European FGC Network meeting.

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