

Wales Update

European Family Group Conference Network Meeting Belgrade 2013

The All Wales Family Group Conferencing Network provides a forum for projects which deliver Family Group Conferences (FGCs) in Wales. It meets four times per year to discuss the development and promotion of FGCs in Wales.

As is the case for many FGC projects, funding continues to be a major challenge for us in Wales. We constantly seek to develop our services in new and exciting ways to access additional / alternative sources of funding.

Family Group Conferences are used in a wide range of contexts including child protection, restorative approaches and community conferencing. The use of FGCs is also being extended to an exciting and innovative project working with prisoners and their families - Invisible Walls Wales.

The Network welcomes members from all projects in Wales and below is a current snapshot of activity from some of the member projects in Wales.

----- o O o -----

Tros Gynnal Plant Family Circle

***Cardiff – Restorative Approaches + Family Group Meeting Project (Cardiff RA/FGM)
by Tesla Raessi - Family Group Meeting Coordinator***

Our sense of well-being is greatly affected by our perceived closeness to those around us. When we feel connected to others and share a sense of empathy and compassion with them we are more likely to feel as though we belong. Where there are strong bonds between family members and where each member feels respected and listened to, families are more likely to thrive. Conflict between family members can lead to disconnection, so it is important to seek ways to repair this as soon as possible. This idea of belonging and repairing harm is an intrinsic element of restorative justice and restorative approaches to working with families.

Restorative approaches and Family Group Meetings (FGM) often go hand in hand. Where there is conflict within families, a restorative approach to working with the family can go some way towards repairing the harm done and contribute to a significant improvement in overall family functioning. A restorative approach is based on the notion that we need to work with the family and not for the family. The approach also places emphasis on allowing each Individual family member the opportunity to express their views and feelings and encourages them to acknowledge and understand the impact of the choices they make.

Cardiff RA/FGM has been working in this way over the past year and have been finding our outcomes and results are higher and more meaningful. We are able to

work with families more flexibly and give them more responsibility for the process and plan.

----- o O o -----

Barnardo's Cymru

Family Group Conferencing within the Invisible Walls Wales (IWW) programme by Karen Rees - Children's Services Manager, Invisible Walls Wales

Within Invisible Walls Wales, FGCs can be utilized to support children and their families whilst father is serving a custodial sentence. They can be convened at a number of points during the families' involvement with IWW:

- To make a plan to support the family out in the community whilst father completes his prison sentence*
- To make a plan to support the family on father's release*
- To make plans to address any issues for the family after release.*

FGCs are also used to make plans for children in a number of different contexts, such as family support, rehabilitation of children, requests for accommodation, where children have disabilities, where parents have a life threatening illness and child protection.

Any family who are selected for Invisible Walls Wales will be eligible to access the Family Group Conferencing Service at any point during the life-span of the IWW programme and up to 6 months following a prisoner's release.

Outcomes for the Family Group Conference

Within Invisible Walls Wales, the Family Group Conferencing Service will seek to:

- Empower families to make safe plans to promote the well-being of their child(ren) and themselves.*
- To provide an opportunity for more positive involvement of fathers.*
- To improve family communication and give children and young people an opportunity to have their thoughts, views and wishes heard.*
- Improve family relationships and utilise family networks and resources.*
- Reduce family isolation, increase social inclusion and reduce the need for professional intervention.*
- Provide the opportunity for families to contribute to and make realistic, achievable and focused plans for positive change in terms that the family can understand.*
- Enhance parent/child relationships by increasing and maintaining family ties whilst an offender is in prison.*

Advocacy

The FGC Services recognises that children and young people and some adult family members, may need support to help them prepare for a Family Group Conference and to have their voice heard at the meeting. To this end the IWW has a full time Advocate, who can work on a one to one basis with children/young people and adult

family members before, during and after the FGC. Volunteer Advocates can also be used when more than one advocate is required for a FGC.

----- o O o -----

Flintshire County Council
Flintshire Family Meeting Service
by Peter Robson - Resources Service Manager

Our Family Meeting Service in Social Services for Children have received a National Accreditation Award. This reviewed our policies, practices and procedures against a set of National Standards as validated by the Family Rights Group. (www.frg.org.uk). We understand out of 16 submissions we were second in order of ranking. The accreditation Panel have complimented us on our service and have identified areas for future development which we welcome. I would like to thank **Jane Jones**, Senior Practitioner for the Service, the co-ordinators and administrator for their contributions.



From left to right, Peter Robson (Resources Service Manager), Cllr. Ann Minshull (Chair, Flintshire County Council), Jane Jones (Senior Practitioner), Neil Ibbotson (Family Group Meeting Co-ordinator).

----- o O o -----

In the last year, two of our member projects have attained accreditation from the Family Rights Group and a number of others are hoping to work towards this status.

My thanks go to all colleagues who provided information for this update.

Neil Ibbotson
Chairperson, All Wales Family Group Conferencing Network
October 2013