

REPORT SEMINAR EUROPEAN FGC NETWORK
Leuven, November 19-20, 2004

By Inge Vanfraechem, Stefaan Viaene and Jan Van Lieshout

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1. FACTSHEET PER COUNTRY

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES IN BELGIUM

Country: Belgium (Flanders)

Name link person: Lode Walgrave

Date: 10.10.2005

- **What projects exist in your country? In what context? (child welfare, schools, judicial system,...)**
 - FGC in judicial context, applied at court level for juvenile offenders who committed a serious crime or several crimes
 - FGC in schools for disciplinary problems
 - FGC in the welfare system for runaway kids

- **How many conferences do you have on a yearly basis? Since when have conferences been applied?**
 - +/- 20 a year in judicial context (since 2000)
 - FGC in schools: this project has recently stopped (14 conferences in 2002-2004)
 - FGC in welfare system: this project will soon be started

- **Do you offer training in FGC? Yes**

- **Are there research results with regard to FGC in your country? Please provide references.**

Claes, M., Spiesschaert, F., Van Dijk, C., Vanfraechem, I. en Van Grunderbeeck, S., 'Alternative practices for juvenile justice in Flanders (Belgium): the case for mediation', in Walgrave, L. (ed), *Repositioning Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice, Criminal Justice and Social Context*, Willan Publishing, 2003, 239-254.

Vanfraechem, I., 'Implementing Family Group Conferences in a Legalistic System. The example of Belgium', in Walgrave, L. (ed), *Repositioning Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice, Criminal Justice and Social Context*, Willan Publishing, 2003, 313-327.

Vanfraechem, I., 'Conferencing for serious juvenile delinquents in Belgium', *Newsletter of the European Forum for Victim-Offender Mediation and Restorative Justice*, vol.4, issue 1, March 2003, 6-7.

Vanfraechem, I., 'Conferencing for Juvenile delinquents at the Level of the Youth Court', European Forum (ed), *Restorative Justice and its Relation to the Criminal Justice System. Papers from the second conference of the European Forum for Victim-Offender Mediation and Restorative Justice, Oostende (Belgium), 10-12 October 2002*, 2003, on the internet, <http://www.euforumrj.org/html/about.activities.asp#conferences>

Vanfraechem, I. en Harris, N., 'Family Group Conferences in Belgium', Dünkel, F. en Drenkhahn, K. (eds), *Youth Violence: new patterns and local responses – Experiences in East and West. Conference of the International Association for Research into Juvenile Criminology*, Forum Verlag Godesberg, 2003, 713-725. (conference proceedings)

Vanfraechem, I. en Walgrave, L., 'Restorative conferencing in Belgium. A way to decrease confinement of youth offenders?', *Corrections Today*, December 2004, 72-75.

Vanfraechem, I., 'Evaluating conferencing for serious juvenile delinquency', in Elliott, E. and Gordon, R., *Restorative Justice: emerging issues in practice and evaluation*, Devon, Willan Publishing, to be published in 2005.

Vanfraechem, I. en Walgrave, L., *Les conférences de groupe familial*. Paper gepresenteerd op het colloque international 'La justice réparatrice et les victimes', Ecole Nationale de la magistrature, Paris 6 et 7 mai 2004, 2005 (in press).

Lemonne, A. en Vanfraechem, I., 'Victim-Offender Mediation for Juveniles in Belgium', in Mestitz, A. en Ghetti, S. (eds), *Victim-Offender Mediation with Youth Offenders in Europe*, Dordrecht: Kluwer International, 2005 (in press).

- **Addresses and contact details for projects or research results (please specify).**

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FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES IN FINLAND

Country: Finland
Name link person: Tarja Heino and Sarianna Reinikainen
Date: 1.12.2004

- **What projects exist in your country? In what context? (childe welfare, schools, judicial system,...)**

The Nordic research project:

www.stakes.fi/hyvinvointi/NFRS -> Project presentation in English

There are a few local projects/activities going on in the country. FGC is used mainly in child welfare, but in growing amount also in other areas in social work.

Some contact persons in local areas:

juha-pekka.vuorio@hel.fi (in the capital area)

eeva-liisa.tamski@porstua.com (in eastern Finland)

jussi.pietikainen@kainuu.fi (in north-eastern Finland, Kainuu)

eivor.soderstrom@bvif.fi (Swedish speaking Finland)

The FGC-activity is growing in the country. More details in Cardiff 2005!

- **How many conferences do you have on a yearly basis? Since when have conferences been applied?**

About 100 client families yearly from 1998 on.

- **Do you offer training in FGC?**

Yes.

- **Are there research results with regard to FGC in your country? Please provide references.**

Yes, but they are all reported in Finnish with an abstract in Swedish.

See also:

www.stakes.fi/hyvinvointi/NFRS/workshops

Heino, T. (2003) Using Family Group Conferencing to Protect Children in Finland in A Professional Publication of American Humane, Volume 18, Numbers 1&2. Promising Results, Potential New Directions: International FGDM Research and Evaluation in Child Welfare.

Heino, T. (2002) The Focus on Children in Family Group Conferences. Results from the Finnish project on the FGC method, 1997 – 2000. Published on www.frg.org.uk - conferences - 8th & 9th October 2002: [Building on Strengths: International Perspective on Family Group Conferences](#) - day one: Comparative European approaches.

- **Addresses and contact details for projects or research results (please specify).**

See above.

- **What other people should be added to list of people who would like to be involved in the network? Please send them through the “personal data” document so their contact details can be added in the list.**

See above.

- **Further remarks?**

We'll provide more information in a year, when a new up-dating will take place.

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES IN THE NETHERLANDS

Eigen Kracht – Centre for Restorative Action

History:

1999-2000: A pioneer group started to develop and implement FGC in NL. At the same time the Family Group Decision Model as well as Youth Justice Model were implemented. The first conference was held in 2000. In NL the conferences are called by a Dutch name: Eigen-kracht conferentie and Herstelconferentie Echt Recht.

From this initiative in 2002 Eigen Kracht – Centre for Restorative Action, was created for the promotion and advocacy of the principles and programs of Family Group Conference in NL. The Centre helps new initiatives to start and develop, provide training, consultation and materials. Over 20 projects are active now in NL. To date (January 2005) over 700 conferences are held.

Where:

Conferences are used in different arenas as Child Welfare and Protection, Education, Domestic Violence Services, Health Care, and in the Youth Justice field: Police and Probation.

Results:

According to research done (see www.wespweb.nl including English translation) for the FGDM on the average 15 people attend a conference. An average plan has 17 agreements. 80% of the agreements are for the family and friends and 20 % are for professionals. After 3 months 60 % of all agreements are executed. Satisfaction out of 1-10 for family is 7.8 and for professionals 7.9.

In the Youth Justice conferences satisfaction for victim and network is 7.9. and for offenders network the same. On the average 10 persons participated in the conference. The average conference lasted a 74 minutes and took 10 hours of preparation. All conference ended successful and with a plan.

Research:

- Echt Recht conferences in the Netherlands, The first experiences, (2002)
- Eigen Kracht 4 part research from WESP-research (2003/4):
 - *Eigen Kracht conferentie, the first experiences*
 - *Eigen Kracht according to the plan, plans and follow-up*
 - *Eigen Kracht participation of children*
 - *Is this the future of Child Care? Satisfaction of participants*

In progress: Autonomy, responsibility and safety – a two year study to the long term effects of Eigen-kracht conferences, by the Free University in Amsterdam in collaboration with PI-research and WESP research.

Coordinators:

130 citizens are trained as independent facilitators for Eigen-kracht conferences. Many have a different than Dutch background and together they can facilitate conferences in different languages: Frisian, English, French, German, Spanish, Arab, Swedish, Chinese, Surinamese, Papiamentu, Berbech, Kurdish, Turkish, South African, Russian, Sign Language, Farsi, Pashto and Dari.

For the Youth Justice conferences are over 200 facilitators trained

Materials:

- Information flyers Eigen Kracht in 6 languages for family, children and professionals
- Information flyers Echt Recht in 4 languages for victims, offenders and professionals
- Eigen Kracht and participation of children, video
- In preparation promotion video Eigen-Kracht
- Quarterly newsletters

Training:

- Eigen Kracht facilitators training including a manual
- Eigen Kracht training for professionals about their changing role, including participants workbook, in collaboration with the School of Social Work in Amsterdam
- Echt Recht training for conference coordinators including manual

Embedding:

Yearly seminars: 2001: Amsterdam; 2002: Province of Gelderland; 2002: Amsterdam (DV); 2003: Province of Groningen; 2003: Province of Drenthe; 2004: Province of Overijssel.

Vocational training for Echt Recht as well as Eigen Kracht facilitators

Publications and PR

Eigen Kracht - Family Group Conference in the Netherlands. From model to implementation, R. van Pagée (red) Publishing house SWP Amsterdam, ISBN: 90 6665 428 7

Articles in: Dutch Magazine for Childcare; Magazine for Care and Welfare; 0-25; Deviant; Magazine for Restorative Justice; National newspapers as: NRC-Handelsblad; Trouw; Algemeen Dagblad; Provincinal Newspapers.

Friends of Eigen Kracht

In 2004 is created 'Friend of Eigen Kracht', an organisation for support and promotion where citizens can contribute or participate in the system change that is facilitated by the introduction and implementation of the principles of Family Group Conference.

Recognition

2001: Echt Recht received an 'Honourable notice' from the Hein Roethof award

2002: Simon Slooten Award, Eigen Kracht recognised as the most innovative project in Child Protection.

2003: Echt Recht chosen as most challenging innovation by the viewers of IKON Television Station

2003: Eigen Kracht and Echt recht received the fifth anniversary award from the Association for Ortho-Agogische Activities.

Financial support:

VSB-Funds; Foundation of Children Stamps; Foundation Doen; Foundation Help for Children; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS).

Training abroad:

The Centre has held FGC and Restorative Seminars and Training in N-W Russia, Poland, Belgium and Ukraine.

Contact:

Eigen Kracht – Centre for Restorative Action, Emmawijk 11, 8011 CM Zwolle

Telephone 038 – 422 25 26 , Fax 038 – 422 68 98

Contact Rob van Pagée or Hannie van der Horst

Email: info@eigen-kracht.nl www.eigen-kracht.nl

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING IN NORWAY

Associate professor Liv Schjelderup & assistant professor Cecilie Omre
liv.schjelderup@uis.no cecilie.more@uis.no
Stavanger University
Norway

December 13th 2005

In Norway, there is a strong political will, and positive attitude, towards granting of economic support to strengthen child protection professionally. Various methods with a network orientation and strengths perspective have been areas of focus in recent years. Those who in 1994 initiated the first national family group conferencing projects were also promoters of a new national focus, which could embrace several districts. There was also a desire that a more thorough teaching program would be provided to more Child Protection Workers; and, not least, that the new focus should be followed by a larger research program which assured access to representative quantitative data.

A new and larger national testing- and evaluation-program of family group conferencing in child protection was put into action in 2002 – 2006, financed by the Department of Child and Family Services. The program includes 54 districts. A teaching program has been given to just under 400 Child Protection Workers. The project is led by NOVA, Norwegian Institute for Research on Childhood, Welfare and Aging. The research will be finished in 2006. Child Protection Workers who have participated in the project have expressed great sympathy for the method. The implementation process has however met different types of resistance. Child Protection Workers has argued that it is difficult to find the right families or that they can not let go their professional responsibilities for children in need.

Something that is peculiar to Norway is that family consultation has been strongly anchored in social worker education. Since the first projects were introduced in Norway, the professional literature about the method has been added to the curriculum and teaching program. Teaching modules have been developed at both the Bachelor and Master level.

Throughout the various project periods, the inclusion and active participation of children in family consultation has been promoted as a particular strength of the method. In 2003, there was an addition to the Norwegian Law for Child Protective Services, which regulates child protection. Children as young as 7 years of age may express their opinion and be heard in cases that concern them. This is in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The addition to the law will make more likely a promotion of the family consultation method in practical child protection work in Norway.

Since 2001 Norwegian researchers have participated in a Nordic research group that has a main focus on implementation of family group conferencing in Scandinavia. Since 2003 this group has made child participation in FGC an active and important theme. There is a need for knowledge about to what extent family consultation realizes its ideal of representing a child perspective. This Scandinavian research project will be finished in 2007.

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING (FGC) IN SCOTLAND

CHILDREN 1ST pioneered the use of Family Group Conferences in child welfare and protection in Scotland in 1998 and have been fully committed to FGC, or **family group meetings** as they are more usually called since that time. Currently there are partnership agreements between CHILDREN 1ST and **9 Local Authorities** with more in discussion. Project listings are available at www.frg.org.uk

Development Unit:

In recognition of the potential for growth of this approach, CHILDREN 1ST has appointed a FGC Development Manager and is establishing an FGC Development Unit to stimulate the spread of this child and family focused service across services for children in Scotland, through consultancy and training, evaluation and dissemination of best practice, and networking of FGC co-ordinators.

Current Arrangements

The arrangements for providing services differ across the local authorities and allow for regional variation:

- ❖ Singleton worker posts,
- ❖ A dedicated family group conference team,
- ❖ Generic CHILDREN 1ST projects providing family group meetings as one part of their overall remit.

Referral Criteria

Referral criteria are negotiated with each partner LA, typically relating to children/ young people in high-risk situations: those who have been abused, or who are at risk of abuse or neglect; children who are accommodated or at risk of so being, and children for whom permanency planning is being considered. Decisions may need to be made about where children are going to live, contact with family members, and the safe care of children.

Use across broad spectrum of need and concern

There is evidence of a growing interest in the use of family group meetings at many different levels and with all ages of children and young people. The family group meeting process is a child-centred, and child-focused planning and decision-making forum, which involves the wider family in partnership with statutory and other agencies. Family group meetings sit comfortably alongside and bring additional value to more traditional methods, for example whilst Family Plans can be presented to Child Protection Case Conferences, to Looked After Child Reviews and to Children's Hearings, these formal bodies can in turn refer families to the family group meeting process.

In addition to the above-mentioned issues of child welfare and protection, family group meetings are suited to the following areas:

- ❖ child health issues including disability and young carers,
- ❖ educational concerns including absenteeism,
- ❖ children and young people in trouble with the law
- ❖ custody and access issues

CHILDREN 1ST provides bespoke internal and external consultancy and training re all aspects of family group meetings, hosts regular **FGC Scottish Network Events** and produces **fgc – the scottish network** newsletter.

Research of the Scottish context includes:

- ❖ Murray C, Phillips R, Evans M, Ni Dubhtaigh L. (Dec 2001) Family Group Conferences in Scotland. The Views of Families and Professionals. University of Stirling
- ❖ Hamilton A. (In Progress) Releasing the Power of the Family. CHILDREN 1ST and Family Group Conferences 1999 – 2004. Children 1st

All general enquiries about family group conferencing should be made to Anne Hamilton, Family Group Conference Development Manager. If you would like your name added to the mailing list for network event information and for the network newsletter, please contact Anne Hamilton on 0131 446 2300 or email anne.hamilton@children1st.org.uk. For general information see our website www.children1st.org.uk

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES IN SWEDEN

Background

Family Group Conferences came to Sweden in the mid-1990s. Two projects were run by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, the first between 1995 and 1997 and the second one between 1998 and 2000. The task of the first project was to try out the model in the child welfare system and adapt it into Swedish conditions. This project was run with the aid of grants from the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. At the request of the Swedish Committee for Crime Prevention Work the aim of the second project was to try out the model on young offenders.¹

Botkyrka, a municipality south of Stockholm, was not a part of the national projects but started to use Family Group Conferences alongside the project.

Present situation

There is no legal mandate for using Family Group Conferences in Sweden, but the values underpinning the method are consistent with legislation.

Despite the fact that there has been no national funding for developing Family Group Conferences in Sweden after 2000 the model has spread to new municipalities. Some of the local authorities, who were part of the national projects, have kept on using Family Group Conferences and new ones have joined in. As a part of the Nordic Project for Family Group Conferences a questionnaire was sent out to all local authorities in Sweden in July 2002. The result shows that 40 of 290 municipalities use the model. Three of these, of which Botkyrka is one, stand out when it comes to the number of Family Group Conferences. During one year, 2001-2002, they held 24-35 Family Group Conferences and 10-65 follow up Conferences each.

Family Group Conference is in Sweden used primarily as a method to plan and make decisions about children and young people at risk. Often the question is whether or not the child must be placed outside of home; in foster care or in an institution. The Swedish legislation says we first have to consider kinship care when looking for foster homes. However, Family Group Conferences are also used in social welfare (economical support), drug abuse cases, in the school system, for homeless people and for elderly. Similar methods have developed alongside. One example is "Parent Group Conferences" where adults around a group of young people with troublesome behaviour have the opportunity to plan together.

Municipalities with one or more persons employed to be responsible for the development of Family Group Conferences are the ones most successful in implementing the model and to go on using it. However the organisation of Family Group Conferences differ from one local authority to the other.

In Sweden the development of Family Group Conferences is driven primarily by social workers from the inside of the system. Social workers, responsible for this development in different parts

¹ Swedish Association of Local Authorities 1997

of Sweden have formed an informal network and meet twice a year. There are also networks for developing Family Group Conferences on a regional and local level.

The Nordic Project

The leaders and researchers of FGC- projects in the Nordic countries have worked together since 2000. In 2002 the Nordic Council financed efforts to collect results from the developmental projects and research carried out in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) and to compare the findings. In 2003 the project received further financing from the Nordic Council for planning, co-ordinating and assembling a Nordic Research study that examines Family Group Conference from a child perspective. More information is to be found on the web page.²

Coordinators

Most local authorities in Sweden employ coordinators for one assignment at a time. The coordinators carry out their duties in their spare time and some are retired. Common to all of them is that they are accustomed to working with people, without necessarily having caring professions. Botkyrka have full-time employed coordinators.

Training

As with developing Family Group Conferences there is no national funding for training of coordinators or social workers in the method. The local municipalities use private consultants or their own personnel as trainers. Courses introducing Family Group Conferences in theory and practise are given as at part of the education for social workers to be at some of the universities.

Research

Five evaluative studies have provided implementation results, with three studying the early national project and two studying Family Group Conferences in Botkyrka. Evaluations that focus on long-term effects, measured by the number and type of interventions from social authority, show there is no difference between outcomes for children who undergo Family Group Conferences and children traditionally served. However, there is a serious problem with the evaluation studies. The study variables have both positive and negative meanings, and there is difficulty creating a comparable control group.³

The future

Important questions right now are how to go on working in partnership with the extended family after a Family Group Conference and how to implement the values underpinning Family Group Conferences in all social work, even when the method not is used.

² www.stakes.fi/hyvinvointi/nfrs.

³ Eva Nyberg 2003

Since there is no national support for developing or evaluating the ongoing work with Family Group Conferences the future of the method in Sweden is somewhat uncertain.

Sweden December 15th 2004

Ewa Näslund, link person in the European network for FGC
ewa@naslund.org

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES IN WALES

Country: **Wales**

Name link person: **Mike Clark & Val Owen**

Date: **14th December 2004**

- **What projects exist in your country? In what context? (childe welfare, schools, judicial system,...)**

Wales is divided into 22 regions called Local Authorities. 17 / 22 Local Authorities use FGC's.

The FGC projects are operated either by voluntary / charitable organizations or by the local authorities themselves.

The majority of projects work with children and young people in need. This includes family support, child protection, children looked after, pre and post-adoption, court proceedings, disability issues.

Some projects also work with children and young people with education issues and some work with young people involved with the criminal justice system.

- **How many conferences do you have on a yearly basis? Since when have conferences been applied?**

The first FGC in Wales was held in 1992. Approximately 350 - 400 FGC's take place in Wales per year.

- **Do you offer training in FGC?**

Most FGC projects offer training to new staff and to potential referrers.

Some projects provide training to staff from other projects.

- **Are there research results with regard to FGC in your country? Please provide references.**

'Outcomes in FGC's for children on the brink of care: A study of child and family participation' – hollands1@cardiff.ac.uk

'The development of an all-Wales Evaluation Tool for Family Group Conferences' – Quinnaziza@cardiff.ac.uk

- **Addresses and contact details for projects or research results (please specify).**

Projects

Cwlwm FGM Project – Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Ynys Mon

Val@cartrefbontnewydd.org

Taith y Teulu – Flintshire

Carol_Salmon@flintshire.gov.uk

Family Answers – Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen, Rhondda Cynon Taff

wamfgcp@mail.nch.org.uk

Family Circle – Cardiff

mike.clark@trosgynnal.org.uk

Vale of Glamorgan FGC Service – Vale of Glamorgan

kbuckler@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

FACT FGM Project – Carmarthenshire

wacfgc@post.nch.org.uk

Ceredigion FGC Service – Ceredigion

heulwen@ceredigion.gov.uk

Parenting Matters – Neath Port Talbot

Karen.rees@barnados.org.uk

Children Matter – Swansea

- **What other people should be added to list of people who would like to be involved in the network? Please send them through the “personal data” document so their contact details can be added in the list.**

Attached

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING IN DENMARK 1999-2004.

Reflections and status Nov. 2004.

http://www.nopus.org/nopusnytt/nyhetsbrev2004_4/eng/DkFRSEng.htm (downloaded on 14.12.2004)

Jytte Faureholm, psychologist, **Lis Brønholt**, social adviser, B.Soc.Sci, assistant professor, Den Social Højskole, Esbjerg, CVU-Vest, Denmark

“Tag familien med på råd” (Take the family to the group conference) is the title of the book about family group conferencing (FGC) in Denmark, that we (Jytte Faureholm and Lis Lyng Brønholt) are editing to be published by Gyldendals in early 2005. In addition to chapters where we describe the theoretical and practical foundations for the nationwide project on FGC in Denmark, the book will include chapters based on the work of practitioners in the field, who, as case workers, co-ordinators and project leaders, have several years' experience of holding family group conferences and following them up.

Although a considerable amount of qualified literature and books about FGC have been published in Norway, Sweden and Finland, there is a great demand in Denmark for Danish material directly relating to experiences from welfare work in the Danish setting.

Since the middle of 1999, FGC has been included as a method and as an example of innovative thinking in social work in connection with child welfare work in Denmark. As in the other Nordic countries, child welfare problems and issues hold a prominent place in the social services' professional forums in Denmark. Interest in measures geared at families at risk and their children has increased, since costs in this area have shown a dramatic increase in state and local authority budgets. From 1993-2001 costs for special measures for children and young people rose by 58 %, and Denmark (in 2001) had the highest frequency of placement in the Nordic region. (See: WWW.kl.dk Facts about measures for vulnerable children and young people. Sept. 2003).

In addition, evidence-informed research in social work has shown that there is scope for a considerable quality improvement in general practice within child welfare work. This would include, for example, creating possibilities for children, families and their networks to really be brought into in the processes of making decisions that affect their everyday lives and conditions of existence.

Family group conferencing as a decision making model is seen as an example of a methodological asset in social work in the child welfare sphere, which could meet the need for participation and influence that the research calls for. The key words and principles of FGC are based, among other things, on a dignified partnership with the child and the family at risk. In order to be able to establish a true partnership with the family and create possibilities for the family and network to take part in the decision making process in a concrete way, it is necessary that the professional worker concerned has trust in and wishes to access the potential strength that the child and family always possess. It is important to mobilise this repertoire of competence – to empower – so that the child's situation can be changed.

It is thought-provoking that ideas about involvement of the family's and network's resources in child welfare work go hand in hand with another political trend. The trend towards increased emphasis on the rights of children and young people (the child's best) and focus on legislation and procedures, with increasing state control and steering.

(Source: K1's høringsvar to udkast til anbringelsesreform. Aug. 2004)

In 1999 the Ministry of Social Affairs decided to instigate a nationwide welfare project in respect of implementing FGC in a number of representative local authorities nationwide. The research work took place over 3 years up to 2003. The Ministry's appropriation also included an evaluation of the project, which was outsourced to the Development and Services Centre for Children and Families in Aabenraa. Two evaluation reports have been published. The first report "En beslutningsmodel med meget mere" (A decision making model with a plus) was published in 2002[i] and is based on quantitative data. The second report was published the following year. It is based on qualitative data and has the title "Familierrådslagning i Danmark" (Family group conferencing in Denmark).[ii]

From the political viewpoint there has been great interest, at the macro and micro levels of society in Denmark, in research work concerned with FGC. Political interest continues to be considerable and in this represents a contrast to the speed of implementation among those working professionally in the social sector. Fewer than expected family group conferences are being held in Denmark.

To remedy this state of affairs the Ministry of Social Affairs is contracting out an educational project on FGC in 2004 and 2005, aiming at reaching 350 workers in this field. The institute for social studies in Esbjerg will be running this project together with the Association of Local Governments and COK in Denmark.

We are both consultants to this assignment and have recently completed the education and training of 7 teams, who will then take charge of the education and training of the 350 workers in the field around the country. Each team comprises 3 members: a leader, whose day to day work is as a lecturer at an educational institution, plus an initiative taker and a co-ordinator, both of whom have several years' experience of family group conferencing.

This time next year (2005) we will be able to produce a new status report concerning the implementation of family group conferencing in Denmark.

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING IN FINLAND

http://www.nopus.org/nopusnytt/nyhetsbrev2004_4/eng/FiFRSEng.htm (downloaded on 14.12.2004)

Tarja Heino, senior researcher at Stakes, responsible for the Nordic research project

During the years 1998 -2000 Stakes (the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health) conducted a family group conferencing project in 26 local authorities, primarily in southern Finland. There have also been other activities alongside this national project. The city of Esbo, with the support of the institute of welfare work, completed a family group conferencing project between the years 1998-2000 in the Mattby-Olars area. During 2000-2002 in the city of Vanda, the Hangool project for immigrant families was carried out. The project was financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). A family group conference project has also been initiated on the island of Åland. The project is being financed by funds from the Penningautomatföreningen. This project is operating in close collaboration with the family group conferencing network in Sweden. The Swedish language Finnish centre of competence, the Matilda Wrede clinic, has, in collaboration with the child welfare association in Finland developed family group conferencing in Swedish in southern Finland.

Stakes mapped out how the method was distributed in the country after completion of the national family group conferencing project in Finland in the year 2002. A questionnaire was sent to all of Finland's 448 local authorities. The responses showed that family group conferencing had become a more common method in at least 36 new places in Finland. In the year 2002 family group conferencing was arranged for 120-150 families and the number of families is expected to rise to 300 this year.

Family group conferencing is used in various parts of the country. In 2002, 60 local authorities/working groups (30% of those asked) reported that they had participated in FGC and 49 local authorities/working groups (25% of those asked) reported that they had arranged at least one family group conference. Some local authorities use family group conferencing as a natural method in social work, while some local authorities (20%) were not actually familiar with the method.

Co-ordination work has been organised according to several different models in Finland. In the metropolitan area of Helsinki, Esbo and Vanda a common co-ordinator bank has been established that organises family group conferencing activities in the area. The employees of the co-ordinator bank consult and support social workers who are prepared to offer their clients family group conferencing, recruit, train and provide guidance for co-ordinators, as well as inform social workers about co-ordinator posts. The co-ordinator bank is collaborating with the Nordic research project into family group conferencing.

Finland is divided into 9 competence centres. In connection with these regional competence centres, local authorities collaborate in respect of family group conference cases and co-ordinator functions. The Swedish language Finnish centre of competence, the Matilda Wrede clinic, offers co-ordinator functions in Swedish in southern Finland in collaboration with the child welfare association in Finland. Some associations act as an agency for co-ordinator functions and the association of local governments has in places combined co-ordination service with the range of

services offered within psychiatric care. In the region around St. Mickel there is a private social services producer who organises and acts as an agency for co-ordination services to the local authorities. In northern Finland it is possible to order co-ordination services via the Internet. In Kainuu there is a co-ordination system for family group conference activities that serves the entire region.

Demand for education in family group conferencing is constantly increasing as a result of the increasing rate of the activity in the local authorities. Nationwide structures for co-ordinating family group conferencing have not yet been created. Stakes has, as the initiator of the family group conference project, arranged seminars and offered the Finnish family group conferencing networks the possibility to meet and exchange experience of various ways of working. The need for meetings such as these has proved to be great. Stakes may also in the future, in collaboration with the regional centres of competence, take responsibility for collecting, collating and analysing experiences of family group conferencing.

The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs has started a comprehensive programme within the social area. One of the main emphases is to develop child protection work and a special programme for child welfare workers was started one year ago. Within this programme family group conferencing may provide a model as to how client influence can be realised in child welfare work and how one can concretely renew working methods and co-ordinate the range of services offered to the clients.

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING IN ICELAND

http://www.nopus.org/nopusnytt/nyhetsbrev2004_4/eng/IsFRSEng.htm (downloaded on 14.12.2004)

Sigrídur Jonsdóttir, head of R&D, Socialtjenesten in Reykjavik

At the social services department in the municipality of Reykjavik children are one of the target groups receiving special attention. In Reykjavik children have been given special priority as a target group during the period 2002-2006. Many methods are being used in this respect. Among other things, one of the goals in the social services' annual plan for 2004 was to start the planning and introduction of family group conferencing as a working method in work with children and families. An important catalyst in this decision was that Iceland was included in the application to the Nordic Council of Ministers for project funds for research into and evaluation of family group conferencing from the child's perspective.

According to the goals stated in the annual plan, the introduction of family group conferencing will be started in Reykjavik by a control group, with representatives from the social services in Reykjavik, Iceland's child welfare board and the University of Iceland. This is important since we are here talking about a collaborative project and it is considered to be important that family group conferencing will later also be introduced in other parts of the country. Representatives in the control group are Anni Haugen, graduate social worker from the child welfare board, Freydis J. Freysteinsdóttir, lecturer at the University of Iceland who is managing the research project, Gudrun Reykdal, graduate social worker and project manager in the R&D unit, and Sigrídur Jonsdóttir, head of the R&D unit, who is leading the introduction of the method. Further, Alma Arnadóttir, a graduate social worker and MA student, will evaluate the research project in her dissertation.

As a first step in the introduction of family group conferencing there was a great need for education about the method. Ewa Näslund and Mats Erkers came over from Sweden to run courses about the family group conferencing method. This was a matter of various courses with different target groups. Politicians and administrators received a short presentation to get an insight into the method, graduate social workers were given a two-day version and co-ordinators a four-day course. Participants were very satisfied with the programme and professional workers, politicians and administrators came from all over the country, although the largest contingent was from Reykjavik. The Child Welfare Board supported the educational programme with a generous sum. Their participation in the project is important as it shows interest on the part of the state in supporting the introduction of the method in the other local authorities in Iceland.

The plan in Reykjavik is that in the year 2005 at least 10 family group conferences will be put into effect, and the first group conference has already been planned for the end of 2004. The first family has already been selected, so one could say we are on the starting blocks. The research project will continue side by side with the actual group conference, so a great deal of co-ordination will be necessary. Before the first conference can begin there is a great deal of preparatory work to be done: translation of diverse lists and leaflets for family, child, professional workers etc. But the work is underway and we are happy to be participating, we expect the work

to be very rewarding, both in respect of improved services and evaluating the project while it is in progress, something that the Reykjavik social services are aiming to do to a much greater extent than we are doing now. Therefore we are expecting a great deal from the introduction of this method in the work with children and families in Reykjavik, especially since the working method is based on increased client involvement and influence, something that the social services in Reykjavik have had high on the agenda in recent years.

THE EXTENT OF THE USE OF THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE MODEL IN THE NORDIC REGION

http://www.nopus.org/nopusnytt/nyhetsbrev2004_4/eng/InlednFRSEng.htm (downloaded on 14.12.2004)

Tarja Heino, senior researcher at Stakes, responsible for the Nordic research project

One could look at the extent of the use of the family group conference model by seeing how widespread knowledge of the method is, but one could also consider it from the point of view of in how many local authority areas has the method been used or how many family group conferences have been initiated.

Knowledge about the family group conference method has spread widely in all the Nordic countries. In Denmark there is hardly a single social worker who has not heard of family group conferences. In all countries, family group conferencing has been a topic on courses in the social services sphere and also in the public media, so the concept of family group conferencing is already very familiar. A number of clients have also asked about family group conferencing.

The first national family group conference projects have been completed. In some local authority areas where projects have been run they have also stopped arranging family group conferences, while in other local authorities this way of working has been confirmed as standard practice. In parallel with the national projects, other local authorities, organisations and private companies have also started to use family group conferencing and have organised courses on the methodology.

All in all, the use of family group conferencing has become more common in all the Nordic countries. Up to the end of 2002 family group conferences had been arranged in 17 local authorities in Denmark (N=275), 40 local authorities in Finland (N=450), in 17 local authorities in Norway (N=400) and in 40 local authorities in Sweden (N=225).

Table. The distribution of family group conferencing in the Nordic countries in 2002

Country	Number of local authorities in which family group conferences have been arranged	These local authorities as a percentage of all local authorities (%)
Denmark	17	6.5
Finland	40	8.9
Norway	17	4.2
Sweden	40	17.7

At the Nordic conference on child welfare, held in Reykjavik in 2003, the Nordic family group conference project was presented. Just one year after the conference, i.e. this year, Iceland decided to join the project. Training courses have been carried out during the year and the first family group conference will be organised in December 2004.

A presentation of family group conferencing in Norway, — development and status

http://www.nopus.org/nopusnytt/nyhetsbrev2004_4/eng/NoFRSEng.htm (downloaded on 14.12.2004)

Associate professor **Liv Schjelderup** and assistant professor **Cecilie Omre**, University of Stavanger, Norway

Family group conferencing was first presented to the child welfare sphere of Norway by Englishman Peter March at a Nordic child welfare congress in Trondheim in 1994. The presentation aroused interest and enthusiasm. The method was tried for the first time in relation to a small group of refugees and immigrants in the Saupstad district of Trondheim. This first initiative in trying out the method comprised 10 family group conferences and received a positive evaluation.

Family group conferencing as a method aroused considerable interest since it broke with traditional child welfare work and the psycho-dynamic traditions of social work. At the same time it was linked with ideas and ideals concerned with client participation and empowerment-thinking. This also made it interesting for politicians who could associate the model with their own social policy ideals concerning the mobilisation of civil society. It was also possible to link the model to central goals concerned with the efficiency, legality and legitimacy of child welfare. Both from the right and left wings of Norwegian politics increasing concerns were expressed during the 90s about the cost levels of the welfare state's welfare services. Any work that could to a greater degree mobilise and involve the public in finding solutions was very welcome. This socio-political situation triggered investment in a series of different methods within child welfare in Norway at the end of 1990s, where family group conferencing was one among several.

This situation could also explain why the Norwegian efforts in respect of family group conferencing in child welfare, have primarily had the character of a top-down profile, i.e. that the method has not emerged from the child welfare professional environment, but rather from the research environment and educational institutions with support from professional policy makers.

The Ministry for children and families in 1998 granted funds to national projects to try out family group conferencing as a method in Norwegian child welfare. Each of the projects took a small selection of local authorities from each area of the country. One project had as its target group children of all ages with the whole spectrum of child welfare problems. In addition, experience was to be gleaned in the use of family group conferencing with ethnic minority families, both in relation to immigrant and refugee families and with the Samic people, who represent Norway's indigenous population. During the course of the project period, however, it proved difficult to access ethnic minority families as participants. Therefore these are only represented to a small extent in the selection. The other national project had as a target group the “worst cases” in child welfare, i.e. matters of such seriousness that they border on assumption of care by the authorities. During the project period there were objections from local authorities that the selection criteria were too narrow. Then the project was widened to allow use of the method in cases with a lower degree of seriousness.

Both projects were positively evaluated. But none of these evaluations were sufficiently comprehensive. Quantitative evaluations were made with limited data. However, a series of professional articles were published that presented the method, reflected experience and gave important qualitative knowledge about the method's use in Norway.

A result of the projects was that the method was experienced positively by participants — both child welfare workers and families who took part. “Family group conferencing is the best advertisement for itself”, was how one child welfare leader expressed it in the evaluation of one of the projects. After they had taken part in the planning and carrying out of family group conferencing both parents, child welfare workers and co-ordinators were positive about their experiences.

In contrast to this enthusiasm, however, it turned out that after projects were concluded there was little or no extension of the use of family group conferencing at child welfare offices. But many of the authorities involved in the project expressed that they would like to take part in a national extension, and stated that they needed help with the further development of the knowledge and competence that they had acquired.

Among researchers several reasons were indicated as to why extension of the method at individual child welfare offices did not take place:

On the one hand, some of the child welfare workers at offices that took part in the projects refused to try the method. Family group conferencing represented a totally different way of working, the method disrupted the power balance and the traditional expert role that child welfare has. Many expressed the feeling that they felt a great deal of insecurity in relinquishing responsibility for what happened to the children, and taking the right decisions to assure the child's best.

On the other hand, some families who were offered the opportunity of using family group conferencing declined. Little is known about why parents did not wish to try this method. What is known is that many child welfare workers are not good at presenting the method, what it involves and the opportunities offered. Further, for many child welfare workers their own ambivalence is a problem, which also affects the presentation situation.

There is in Norway a strong political will and positive attitude towards granting financial means for strengthening child welfare professionally. Various methods with network orientation and power perspectives have been areas to receive attention in recent years. Those who initiated the first national family group conference projects were activists in getting a new national investment that could benefit more local authorities. It is desirable that there should be a more thoroughly thought out teaching plan to reach more child welfare workers, and not least that a new initiative should be followed by a more extensive research programme that will assure access to representative quantitative data.

A new and larger national test and evaluation programme of family group conferencing in child welfare was initiated in 2002-2006, financed by the child and families ministry. 54 local authorities are involved in this. An educational programme will reach 400 child welfare workers. The project is being headed by Nova, the Norwegian institute for research into growing up and welfare.

Something that is particular for Norway is that family group conferencing has gained a strong anchor hold in social worker education. Since the first projects were introduced in Norway, specialist literature about the method has been a feature of teaching programs, and teaching modules have been developed at both Bachelor and Masters levels.

Throughout the various project periods, children's inclusion and active participation in family group conferencing has been put forward as a particular strength of the method. In 2003 there was in Norway a revision of the law concerning child welfare services. Children from the age of 7 years should be allowed to give their opinion and be consulted about matters that concern them. This is in line with the UN children's convention. This change of legislation should reinforce family group conferencing as a method for practical child welfare work in Norway.

Since 2001 Norwegian researchers have been taking part in a Nordic research group that has its main focus on the implementation of family group conferencing in the Nordic region. Since 2003 this group has focused on the participation children in family group conferencing. There is a need for knowledge about to what extent family group conferencing realises its ideals of representing a new child perspective. It will also provide comparative data that can expand the frames of reference of the method.

Family group conferencing in Sweden - Research & Development

http://www.nopus.org/nopusnytt/nyhetsbrev2004_4/eng/SvFRSEng.htm (downloaded on 14.12.2004)

By Eva Nyberg, PhD, head of research R&D-Södertörn

In Sweden the amount of research into the method called family group conferencing (FGC) is extensive in relation to the size of the activity. This research is primarily made up of empirical evaluations, however with varying quality in respect of research (Erkers & Nyberg, 2003). The main body of reports concerns participants' experiences of FGC but measurements of effect are also to be found among the published material. The material used as a basis for the evaluations is above all the very first group conferences that were carried out, primarily within the national project conducted by the Swedish association of local governments in 10 local authorities.

The first two Nordic conferences on FGC have also resulted in conference reports that had the character of a rendering of accounts of the current state of knowledge (Erkers & Nyberg, 2001, Faureholm & Pedersen, 2002).

Some retrospective evaluations

The evaluations of FGC show great similarities in the questions asked and methods used. They present a quantitative accounting of the number of group conferences, the number of participants, approved/not approved plans of action etc. Apart from this there is focus on the participants' experiences of the group conference, in some investigations complemented with a later measurement, and in some a follow up of the situation for the child regarding contact with the social services.

Most of the studies are retrospective, with a questionnaire to participants after the group conference, with an in-depth part comprising interviews with some of them. In some cases the same questionnaire has been used for all participants, sometimes different questionnaires have been used for the private network and for the professional participants. The questionnaires have had strong normative elements, i.e. been more geared at the answer elements 'good-bad', than descriptive elements that answer 'how' questions. In some investigations, other interested parties, mainly administrators within the social services, have been interviewed about the FGC work. The interviews have mainly been used as an illustration of the results of the questionnaires in figures (Bäckström, 2002, Edlund, 2001, Sjöblom, 1999, Sundell & Haeggman, 1999).

The main results of the evaluations can be summarised:

- all participants express a positive opinion about the experience of the group conference
- the children and young people who were the subject of the group conference and the social workers are somewhat less positive than other participants, i.e. the private network, other professionals (informants) and co-ordinators
- placement with relatives is much more common among "FGC-children" than among others when the children are placed in a family home
- social workers have great faith in the resources of the network regarding problem solving for children and young people
- participants considered that FGC was a suitable method to use to solve the problems in question

- the pre-set formulation of questions for the group conference are often reformulated and encompass additional problems to the original ones
- in most cases the group conference results in a plan of action, that also is in most cases accepted by the social services
- in those cases where follow up has taken place, measures in the plan of action have been fulfilled to varying degrees, but in at least half of the cases
- fewer group conferences than expected were organised under the period the evaluation encompasses

In their summaries the authors have chosen to emphasise different results. Some concentrate on the participants' positive experience of the group conference and discuss how the method can be given a wider distribution. Several investigations also report the social workers' judgement of the children's development shortly after the group conference. A majority consider that the child has gained a better situation as a result of the FGC. In one survey, that also includes follow up after a longer period, the positive experience is contrasted with the fact that almost one in four of the children were again the topic of case investigation at the time for follow up.

There are various explanations as to the low number of FGCs arranged within the various projects presented. Social workers' attitudes, or different functions in relation to the client than the traditional, are particularly discussed (e.g. Näslund, 2001).

One problem in evaluating the results of the investigation is the lack of investigations of corresponding questions asked in traditional client investigations. This means that there are no possibilities for comparison.

Some process descriptions

Frisk and Kjellbom (2001) give a concrete and detailed description of the social worker's and co-ordinator's division of work in an investigation with elements of FGC, an example of process description usable for an analysis of the changed functions of the case worker in methodological development work.

In three interviews Dalgrund (2001) followed one girl from planning to conclusion of the family group conference process. The article illustrates how a young person can refer to FGC as an experience in an interview that takes the form of a free conversation.

Based on interviews and case studies with observations, also at that phase of the group conference referred to as the family's "individual council", Andersson & Bjerkman (1999) have written a report of their study of FGC within the Swedish association of local government's pilot project. The report differs from others through its detailed case descriptions, which gives the reader a feeling of being present in the family group conference process. The book thereby functions as a good illustration of the method of working in practice. In the accounting of results, the group conferences are categorised according to pre-determined criteria for well-functioning group conferences, which gives the investigation the character of a goal-related evaluation. The group conferences are categorised into three types that the researchers call all-encompassing, ambivalent and enclosing. The different types describe to what extent the group conference fulfils the criteria for a good group conference.

Qualitative material has been collected in quite a few of the evaluations, through observations of the implementation processes or through interviews with the group conference participants. The possibilities that characterise qualitative material have however hardly been exploited but have rather been used as support for the quantitative aspects of the investigation. A deeper analysis of the qualitative material is lacking.

An evaluation of effect in the longer term perspective

The evaluation of effect that has been published by the R&D unit in Stockholm's city (Sundell, 2002) is particularly important since it is the only one of its type that places attention on the consequences of FGC in the longer term. It has also received considerable attention in the media as one argument against FGC as a working method. But for several reasons the investigation rather represents an illustration of how difficult it is to find and define variables that can be used to give a credible and reliable measure of efficacy.

In the report the author gives an account of a follow up 3 years after the first child care investigation of the children and families that were included in an earlier evaluation (Sundell & Hæggman, 1999) of 74 group conferences within the Swedish association of local government's project.

The conclusions drawn are that FGC-model does not answer the highly placed expectations and the enthusiasm that it initially created. At the same time the author writes that the evaluation does not give any evidence that FGC is any worse than traditional investigations.

Future research issues and methods

Research up to now within the area of FGC activities in other words consists of evaluations of practice. With few exceptions the group conference is described through accounts of the different phases in the working model. More detailed process descriptions of different patterns for the sequence of events during the various phases is still lacking. These are needed to increase understanding about how fundamental theoretical assumptions for the working of the method function, namely a change to mutual acceptance of responsibility for the family member's life situation within one private social network.

At various points in the texts one can discern the group conference's decisive significance for the children and young people who are the subject of a FGC (e.g. Dalgrund, 2001). In the evaluations, the children and young people express themselves somewhat less positively about the group conference in retrospect than the adult participants in the network. Andersson & Bjerkmann (1999) describe the group conference process where the children's perspective is more or less upheld. In most evaluations the child, in spite of being the main character in the group conference, is not given attention in any way different to that in which the other participants are represented. Still, many of the children who have been asked state that the group conference was better than they had expected and that it felt good afterwards. The group conference's significance for the child or young person as the central figure in the family group conference process is actually up to now a field of research that has been neglected, in spite of the fact that working from the perspective of the child is among the basic principles of the method of working. Within the framework of the ongoing Nordic project on family group conferencing (Heino, 2003) an evaluation will be carried out that focuses particularly on the child in the family group conference process.

Development

Ewa Näslund, social worker and M.Soc.Sci. and Mats Erkers, head of the family group conferencing section, the social services in Botkyrka

Family group conferencing came to Sweden in the mid-1990s. The Swedish Association of Local Governments ran one project between 1995 and 1997 in 10 Swedish local authorities, with the aim of trying out models and adapting them for Swedish circumstances. In parallel with this, Botkyrka local authority, to the south of Stockholm, started its own Family group conference project.

The biggest differences between the various projects was that in the Swedish Association of Local Governments' project independent laymen were recruited and trained as co-ordinators, while in Botkyrka the local authority employed its own professional co-ordinators of Family group conferences. This led to a debate, at times lively, about the role of the co-ordinator, which today has resulted in a deeper understanding of the various demands and role expectations that can be placed on the co-ordinator in his or her work.

Later, the Swedish Association of Local Governments carried out a further national project; Family group conferencing for young offenders, where conciliation was included as a part of the group conference.

In spite of the fact that after this there hasn't been any national state support for the development of family group conferencing in Sweden, the method has spread to many local authorities. This has been largely through social workers' own commitment and as a result of the fact that various political representatives at local and parliamentary level have propagated for this method of working. Some of the local authorities that took part in the Swedish Association of Local Governments project have continued to use family group conferencing and new local authorities have started to use the methods. As part of the Nordic project for family group conferencing conducted during 2002 the extent and alignment of family group conference activities in the country was mapped out. The results showed that 40 of Sweden's 290 local authorities have since used family group conferencing*. Of these the municipalities of Botkyrka, Uppsala, Hudiksvall and Gotland stood out as leaders in the development when it comes to the number of family group conferences realised.

In most Swedish local authorities the social services offer FGC in situations where there is a more far-reaching need to plan for a child or young person's future. This might be a child or young person who for various reasons risks being taken into care or has already been taken into care as an emergency measure. Swedish legislation has been changed so that the social welfare committees in such cases must always in the first case investigate whether the child can be placed with a relative or other person close to the family. Even if family group conference activities are heavily focussed on FGC for children and young people it has also been offered within other areas such as maintenance support/financial assistance, for adults with addiction problems, for the homeless, and within the care of the elderly. Similar methods of working have also been adapted e.g. parent group conferences that give adults the opportunity to plan together, when

there is a group of children or young people whose mutual behaviour is experienced as problematic (e.g. anxieties over bullying, incipient substance abuse or criminality).

The local authorities that have succeeded best in offering and developing family group conferencing have had one or several staff members with a full or part time position reserved for that function. In some local authorities the person responsible for family group conferences has even had their own budget and/or staff.

Those social workers who are responsible for the further development of the family group conferencing work in various parts of Sweden have formed an informal network and meet twice a year. There are also networks for social workers and co-ordinators at local and regional level.

One important question has been how to in future succeed in further deepening knowledge about FGC at social worker level so that they are involved in and take responsibility for the continued development. Family group conferencing is, after all, not a traditional client-provider model, but both the social worker role and the co-ordinator role are of decisive importance in the FGC-process. Another issue that concerns those practising the method is how to succeed in working in partnership with the child and those close to it over time and what consequences this will have in the work after the family group conference. This is so that this is not just a "one-night-stand" from the professional angle, after which one returns to methods of working where those close to the children are not regarded as important collaborative partners.

Swedish practitioners of family group conferencing today lack more long-term national support for the development of knowledge within FGC and the development of FGC in Sweden is thereby associated with a great deal of uncertainty.

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Family Group Conference from a child perspective - the Nordic Research project 2004 – 2006

http://www.nopus.org/nopusnytt/nyhetsbrev2004_4/eng/FRSForskningProjektEng.htm (downloaded on 14.12.2004)

Tarja Heino, senior researcher at Stakes, responsible for the Nordic research project, Sarianna Reinikainen, researchers at Stakes

Family Group Conference (FGC) as a method in child protection social work is originally developed in New Zealand. The aims have been to empower the minority population (maori people), to strengthen the possibilities for the clients in child protection to have a better say and to be heard in their case; and to lessen the public intervention in to the family matters and to seek for the resources in the private family networks.

The Nordic countries have had their national projects on FGC during the years 1995 - 2002. The experiences and results of these research and developmental projects have been compared, analysed and reported (Heino & Reinikainen & Bergman 2003). This work made very visible that the methods and the outcomes have in general not been explored from the child's perspective - not even internationally.

FGC offers an interesting practical setting to explore the position and meaning of networks in child protection context, to discuss concepts like empower, social capital, subjectivity, power, professional assessments, expertise, childrens' position as clients and their way of processing, producing and constructing knowledge about themselves. Focusing on children, hearing their voices needs to be studied.

The methodological challenges are manifold. Firstly in comparative research field, secondly in focusing on the child, thirdly in interviewing the children, fourthly in following the changes in the real contexts of living people in their life processes, fifthly in ethical aspects in the study. Planning on how the phenomena and the outcomes can be examined so that the focus stays on the child and the process is followed from the child's point of view makes up an experimental Nordic setting.

Empirically, the main research questions are: How do children experience FGC? How do children's situations change after FGC? What is child orientation in FGC as an ideal/a principle? How is child orientation realised in FGC in practice?

The core of the research consists of case analyses. The common Nordic data is gathered by interviewing children four times during the process and follow-up for 2 years. Number of FGC in each country will be min 10 - that means at least 50 children.

Also all documents that are generated in the FGC-process are gathered. Regarding to resources in each country also observing, interviews and questionnaires are used to the participants (childrens' helpers, parents, larger family and friends, coordinators, social workers and other professionals).

The Nordic research consists of the common part and the national completing parts. The research is done in dialogue which also helps to be able to see and discuss about the differences in practise between the Nordic countries. The research group is looking forward to the process.

2. REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

2.1. Overview of the themes

A report is available on the following themes:

- Potentials of FGC in Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC)
- Models and Context
- FGC in Sensitive Areas
- Worst Cases: What Can We Learn?
- FGC and Research
- All Aspects of System Change
- FGC and Child Advocate
- Youth Justice Experience in a Defensive Culture
- How to Influence the Professionals
- Ethnicity and Cultural Differences

There was no interest for the following themes, so no working group was held on the following:

- Potentials of Restorative Justice in CEEC
- Targets and Accountability

Theme 1: Implementation in Central Eastern European Countries

- * Implementations should start with small projects in small communities but with assuring high quality.
- * Top-down + grass roots processes should be stimulated at the same time.
- * The general principles and philosophy of peaceful conflict resolution have to be taught in the general education systems and should be included in the universities' curriculum.
- * PR, the use of local and national media is very important.
- * Cultural differences have to be taken into account and the way of combining different methods should reflect on them.
- * International exchange is necessary, but the final model should be designed by the targeted countries themselves.
- * Research about the actual facts and situation are necessary before implementing projects.
- * There is a need for national and international exchange and networks.

Theme 2: Models and Context

- * Different models of conferencing do exist, but not all can be called FGC.
- * To be called FGC, there are five conditions:
 - (1) preparation
 - (2) independent facilitator
 - (3) private time
 - (4) involving extended family
 - (5) plan/decision is made by the non-professionals
- * Other conferences are important, but should be called... something else.
- * This basic model of FGC can be adapted to different contexts, going from prevention to responding to serious (youth)crimes and child neglect/maltreatment.

Theme 3: FGC in Sensitive Area's?

- * Does this imply extra skills or a better use of our existing skills?
- * Importance of neutrality and independence.
- * Emphasis on safety: ask your participants what would make them feel safe?
- * Share responsibility with participants.
- * Facilitators may need additional support; they have a choice too!
- * "Safety net" of rapid response.
- * Difficulty of establishing a 'referral system' from victims/ persons harmed.
- * Offer separate spaces (rooms!) but facilitate dialogue on areas of mutual concern (i.e. children).
- * Legal systems separate and confine due to desire to protect... protect who? The systems need!
- * Linking into Women's Shelters in domestic violence cases in Amsterdam.
- * Recognize the reality of women's choices.
- * Preparation involves the identification of participants' interests and needs.
- * Provide a 'language of conflict' and maybe re-resolution which isn't violent.
- * How do facilitators 'manage' the emotional content of meetings?

- * Selection of appropriate facilitators? Issues of trust, most skilled or best fitted?
- * Providing contextual and background general information to inform family on matters of decision-making as well as information about which services exist.
- * Who is talking to the children?
In domestic violence the focus is often on the mother/woman, but in the Netherlands 1/3 of the actual victims of domestic violence are children.

Theme 4: Worst Cases: What Can We Learn?

- * Can we exclude people (professionals, divorced parents, peers) from a conference?
- * What when certain professionals don't contribute to conference? (Can impede effectiveness)
- * Check venue before conferences takes place: is it a suited location to hold a conference?
- * Importance of follow-up of the execution of the plan. Review-conferences can be a good tool.
- * Expectations might not be met.
- * How to involve a wider network? Can you refuse to have a FGC when no network is present?
- * Professionals might see a problem, which is not a problem for the family.
- * Role of parents: denying responsibility, feeling ashamed. It is not always easy to work with parents.
- * Praise people when they do well!

Theme 5: FGC and Research

- * Knowing why we do it. We all know FGC works, then why do we have to do research?
- * Qualitative research is necessary, but qualitative takes the thing forward (especially when it comes to politics).
- * The people who will be convinced, will be convinced. Those who won't, won't. So what's then the purpose of research? E.g. Action-research: the researcher gives feedback to the practitioners and can thus help to develop a qualitative practice.

Theme 6: All Aspects of System Change

- * Changing the system needs approaches on many levels at the same time.
- * Avoid focusing on cheaper. Bottom line can be: it's no worse than the main systems.
- * FGC is not a solution or a plain intervention, it is a planning and decision making forum.
- * Look for opportunities to influence, to make coalitions, to capitalize on political agendas, find champions who will be committed for whatever reason (belief or need).
- * Creating mandate requires planned strategies based on systematic analysis of resistance and possibilities.
- * Make professionals own the process so FGC works 'with' not 'against' professionals.

Theme 7: Child Advocates

- * We think that children should have an advocate at a FGC. This advocate could be from within the family or could be a professional advocate.
- * Some questions:
 - How do family advocates manage their dual role? Namely to ensure that the child is heard, but at the same time being a member of the support network and wanting to have an own input.
 - Should professional advocates participate in private time?
- * Advocates should be:
 - child focused
 - have good communications with a variety of ages
 - flexible and creative: understand child's culture
- * Projects share advocates. Some projects use advocates for vulnerable adults and addiction issues, for mental health issues and for learning difficulties.
- * In England and Wales there are 'standards for advocacy'.
 - England: www.doh.gov.uk
 - Wales: www.nafw.gov.uk (???)

Theme 8 : Youth Justice in a Defensive Culture

- * Clearer models may resolve/ address resistance?
- * Beware of evidence-/ed practice: easier to say well than to do well.
- * Flexibility to allow models to reflect cultural norms/realities.
- * Does 'evaluation' evaluate/help/address/challenge?

Theme 9: How to Influence the Profession(als)?

- * Change key people in the system.
- * Look at the people's agenda, power and will.
- * Different approach.
- * Prioritise what families want and need.
- * Campaigning for system change.
- * If we can't change the system, the best we can achieve is repressive tolerance.
- * Shift resources from evaluations to campaign.

Theme 10: Ethnicity and Cultural Differences

- * Differences within ethnicities. Ethnicities also generate children's roles.
- * Accessibility for services to families and other way round varies in different cultural and/or ethnic settings.
- * 'What we see is not what we see'.
- * Ethnic minority families may have other types of networks.
- * Family relationship dynamics:
 - coordinator's understanding, sensitivity and acceptance
 - respecting difference and finding 'bottom line' (this could be what is restricted by law).
- * Is the possible mistrust from minority groups to indigenous people a cultural issue or the result of the fear for social exclusion?

3. REPORT CONCLUDING SESSION (by Jan Van Lieshout)

The last circle

In the closing circle some participants were asked for remarks and observations: I take with me...

‘That lovely situation of Ireland. I heard at the start of our conference ‘150.000 euro was available for giving help. But, due to the plans of the families themselves we used only 20.000 euro so far, because families take their responsibility’.

‘Our targets are the same. We have similar agenda’s. There is much consonance’. ‘But also the differences were very interesting’.

‘The principles are equal. Different approaches are all accepted’.

‘We have met that terrible newspaper. So we’re now in a defensive position’.

‘But at that time of ongoing struggle I’ve got in these days new energy, I refreshed myself with so many suggestions, also at the coffee machine’.

‘We’re now three years from the start of the European Forum. Internationally we did so much effort in such a short period. It’s an amazing wide spread movement’.

‘I’m impressed that so much intensive work is done. It’s good to take this two days for some reflection. Just social workers need this’.

‘The voice of the client, panels of participants, not only the overall evaluations, we need that voice, and also the conferences, bringing up in campaigning. We need to work with small communities, empowering them’.

‘We, in Russia, are going to build up a system of conferencing, starting next December. Being here was very inspiring and helpful. We were the only country without conferences until now. We listened to your experiences. Now, we have so much to our disposal’.

‘It was good to get acquainted with you and your experiences, especially all that discussions about the role of professional social workers en to have to reflect on that role’.

‘Who gave the five conditions about FGC? I read on your flap: May be it’s a wonderful and helpful meeting, but it’s not a family group conference. So, I guess, it is not about what is the best form, but about ‘core business’. The private time for the family. How private? How long private? What is that condition? No, it’s just about private. We have to tell that to the community and to the agencies. Big discussions about models A, B, C, D brings our work in danger. The reason: the hart of what we are doing is to change the helping system behind’.

‘We in Belgium are working on conferencing within the criminal justice system. We give the morality as a basic value tot that framework: the offender meet the needs of a victim. Here, we spoke at the first time about conferencing and the welfare system’.

‘I found it valuable that kind of principles to bring in a conference model, because always our community is looking for the possibilities to give form to that principles’.

‘At first the emphasis on this model was about children in trouble. There were to aspects: how to do with a justice system for young children? How to do with child protection? The model gave respect to what the indigenous people felt and did when their children were in trouble. For me that is inspiring’.

‘But that cultural affected system is not a cultural specific issue. We need to bring together the victims and the offenders for moral reasons from the scope of the offender system’.

‘The struggle for implementing these models requires a lot of time. It’s a big change: handing over the power. Now we are evaluating time after time. We will prove the successes. I think we have to change our evaluating labour into campaigning’.

‘We think we have to justify ourselves. Social workers at the other side don’t ask the approval either. We work hard for getting the conditions for implementing the conference model. We exhaust ourselves to do research and more research. Stop that. We have a body of knowledge. We have evidence: the model is working. Or, feel we a battle in ourselves?’

‘Let we say: this is another manner of decision making. It’s not a model for problem solving. No doubts about that. We only have to campaign this way of decision making’.

‘Our research needs to be done for fund finding, not yet for building more evidence. What we did these days was reflection on the best practice’.

Next steps

We decided:

Each country makes a fact sheet about:

Projects (short context), # Conferences, Training, Research, Info addresses

We developed this Forum within three years: sitting in circles, talking about the model and its implications, about our best practices on an informal way. We are connected by linked persons in each country. We will go further on in this way.

We used the open space technology. That was a better way to organise the agenda.

We can learn from each other, more than in the lounges of formal congresses.

We work more concentrated, more intensive.

We could easily combine the FGC and RJ model.

It’s a more vulnerable, but more fruitful collaboration.

It links up with our need of logistic updates, year by year.

There are some other congresses coming up in 2005 and 2006. Have we to combine our meeting like a pre-conference in the shadow of a big congress? Some of us have difficulties to find enough funds for coming, also now in Leuven (Sweden, Denmark, Finland; Poland).

2005, Manchester, FRGroup in collaboration with IIRP

2005, A Northern Ireland assemblee

2006, The Nordic Congress on FGC

2006, A New Zealand congress.

We choose to continue this small way of bringing together our experiences, without connection to the big congresses. Our own identity: working fully on the practical issues. When some country cannot attend others will represent them as good as they can.

(e.g. Norway-Zweden-Finland-Denmark; Netherlands-Central Europe).

We are connected by the link persons. Will we limit the amount of participant pro country? We think of a maximum of five, may be six.

The first and also the second meeting was organised by the Family Rights Group in London.

This third meeting is organised by the Dutch and Belgium colleagues in Leuven.

The fourth meeting will be on 11th and 12th of November 2005.

The Cardiff team will it organise at de location of their university.

We will make a report on this before 15th of December. The Belgium team will exchange.

Many thanks to them.

4. CONTACT DETAILS OF MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN FGC NETWORK

BELGIUM

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In what context do you apply conferencing? I am just interested in the topic. I do not apply conferencing.	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Our organisation supports the applying of FGC by supervision facilitating training. (our main task is supporting organisations in the field of child care).</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School conflicts. - Initiatives to use it in Child Welfare. - Family conflicts. 	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?</p> <p>Real Justice.</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing?</p> <p>Research on FGC for serious juvenile delinquency</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?</p> <p>New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Juvenile delinquency</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Research on Restorative Group Conferencing at school</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? Real Justice (Echt Recht)</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Youth Mental Health</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand?</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing?</p> <p>Research on FGC for serious juvenile delinquency</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?</p> <p>New Zealand</p>	

FINLAND

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Mainly in child protection	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? NZ applied in the circumstances in Finland - a Finnish application of our own.	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Mainly in child protection</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? Applied NZ</p>	

FRANCE

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Conferencing are not really applied in France, only VOM. The philosophy of some social practices are near but the expression is not known	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?	

IRELAND

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Welfare	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand – Welfare.	

THE NETHERLANDS

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Youth care Eigen Kracht Domestic Violence	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? FGC I'm regionmanager FGC for the Province of Gelderland.	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Youth care, domestic violence, persons with handicaps (mental / physical, retarded) Children and adults.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? FGC – Decision making.</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? In education / training professionals.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? FGC – decision making</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Team Implementing</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand (FGC) Real Justice</p>	

NORWAY

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Researcher	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Mostly in criminal offences.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? Don't know. For the time being we are searching for our own model, or discussing which one to apply.</p>	

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In what context do you apply conferencing?	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Protection / Child Welfare Project: Woman's shelter</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing?</p> <p>I am a researcher in a PhD project: “Children and youths in Family Group Conferences”. I study children’s participation, and the role of the support person.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?</p> <p>New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? National Project Manager (implementation) in Norway</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

RUSSIA

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Together with Russian partners, we are implementing FGC in North-West Russia. We want to learn from other experiences.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? The model introduced to us by Mr. Rob van Pagee from Holland (Family Rights). Restorative Justice, the model which is already introduced in Moscow six years ago.</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? We are implementing method of FGC in Russia and would like to know more about the experiences of the other countries.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? The model was introduced by Rob van Pagee from Holland. We use the Restorative Justice model, which was introduced and used in Moscow</p>	

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Welfare Protection	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand	

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Welfare, adults, elderly	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand	

UK

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In what context do you apply conferencing? - Where a child is at serious risk of coming into care. - School attendance problems. - Elderly where they may need residential care.	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand Model.	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Welfare Model. Country wide service, which I manage.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? With serious and persistent young offenders, post court. And with prevention cases in a younger age group.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand model with private time, but also we run Victim Offender Mediation.</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Welfare</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Consultancy and Network</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

WALES

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In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Welfare	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing?</p> <p>We use FGC's for child welfare matters at present but hope to include Youth Justice in future development of the service.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?</p> <p>New Zealand model as promoted by the Family Rights Group</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Welfare</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Child Welfare, Court Work, Youth offending, Child protection</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? In relation to children in need and child protection</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? New Zealand</p>	

Name	O'NEILL Sean
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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing? Development officer for FGC in Wales.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)? Support projects which use NZ/child welfare model.</p>	

Name	OWEN Val
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<p>In what context do you apply conferencing?</p> <p>We work with all children and young people who are in need. This can include child protection; Children Looked After, Pre and post adoption, court proceedings, family support, disability issues, young offenders, etc.</p>	
<p>What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?</p> <p>Our work is based in the New Zealand model and agrees with the UK code of practice.</p>	

Name	REES Karen
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In what context do you apply conferencing?	
Children's Welfare	
What model do you use (New Zealand, Real Justice)?	