

Family Group Conferencing – the situation in Norway

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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.