

## Country report 2019 - EU FGC Network:

### The Netherlands



#### ***Basic information on the Eigen Kracht Centrale***

The Eigen Kracht Centrale is an independent non-profit organization that started in 2000 with the first Family Group Conferences (Eigen Kracht-conferenties). We are striving for a society based on participation and mutual self reliance of citizens, where citizens remain in charge of their own life, especially when dealing with organizations and government bodies.

Important in the vision of the Eigen Kracht Centrale:

- Everyone is part of society and everyone can participate.
- Everyone has a say and remains in charge of his or her own life.
- Everyone gets support from their own social network: family, friends, neighbors, etc. Nobody is alone in the world and in case of difficulties and problems it is important to widen the circle of the main-person to their own social network: family, friends, neighbours, colleagues... Especially when problems arise that might lead to involvement of various (social care) institutions.

We work together with 400 independent conference facilitators, who are trained by our nation wide working organization. They receive a 3-day training FGC-coordinator and after the first two conferences they get another 3-day training restorative training that allows them to also facilitate restorative and community conferences. For every conference they are coached by one of our staff and we offer regional and national support meetings.

#### ***Focus for FGC's is on compulsory situations***

In the Netherlands the social welfare system has changed a lot over the last few years. Local communities became responsible for three areas (child and youth care, work and care for chronic ill people and elderly) that before were the responsibility of the regional and national government. At the same time the Law of Child Welfare and the Law of Social Care changed. Dutch citizens have a legal right to make their own Family Group plan as it is called in the Child Welfare Act.

Both changes resulted in professionals being very busy with this new and different way of working and being less open to refer families to formal Family Group Conferences.

The positive change is for professionals that it has become more normal to involve family members and to make plans together. There is a lot of attention for networks and for the strengths of families!! Professionals attend people on the possibility to make a plan. But they themselves don't have a lot of time for preparation of circles and there is not a lot of attention for leaving families in control of their own lives. So what we see is that professionals facilitate families in making their own plan, in voluntary situations. In compulsory situations a Family Group Conference with an independent coordinator is needed.

In the Netherlands the Eigen Kracht Centrale invest a lot in training professionals making circles in voluntary situations and offering formal Family Group Conferences (Eigen Kracht-conferenties) facilitated by independent coordinators in compulsory situations. For example situations where the safety of children or adults is at stake; where a child might be placed out of home; in situation for an adult with psychiatric problems who might be compulsory taken in hospital care; where a family is threatened to be evicted of their home.

In compulsory situations professionals have a different position. They need to set conditions for a plan and give professional help. The independent coordinator is important to bring together the system world and the life world. Besides their complicated position, professionals don't have the time to widen the circle and prepare the people for a conference. In total over 12.000 Family Group Conferences were performed.

There still is a lot of work to inform families about their right and to assist professionals in really leaving control with families and giving them a chance to make their own plan. And society still needs to learn to trust families.



### ***Different areas***

Most of the Dutch conferences are still about child care and child protection. The situations that ask for a conference become more and more complicated. We do conferences for children and youngsters, but also for adults and elderly. Mostly in situations where the State is going to intervene or has intervened (child protection, out of home placements, depts, house evictions, psychiatric confinement).

Besides Family Group Conferences, Restorative Conferences and Community Conferences (for neighbourhoods) we also provide trainings for professionals, to support them in this different way of working with Families. We also share our experience and knowledge with local communities and organizations, by providing training, participating in different policy and program meetings, assisting to develop policies and supporting organizations in their practical work.

Based on our experience and knowledge we are also active abroad by assisting others in implementing this different approach of citizens. Recently we worked to support FGC and Restorative Practice developemnts in Latvia, Singapore, Israel, Czech Republic and India

### ***Restorative practices***

The Eigen Kracht Centrale collaborates with Restorative Justice Netherlands. During the 19 years of our existence we have facilitated many restorative conferences for victims and offenders and their networks and in complicated situations in communities. We are working on a project to renew the attention for restorative conferences, with a fundraising organisation. We also participate in a European project: RESTORE, (Erasmus +), initiated by Ligand in Belgium. This is a project on restorative practice in schools, together with six others countries. We develop and learn together and work towards a restorative school in each of the participating countries.

### ***Research***

Since the start of the Eigen Kracht Centrale over 60 different researches have been done. Every year an independent Institute or 'Hogeschool' ( applied sciences) does research on the satisfaction and follow up of the Family Group Conferences. This year an independent researcher has researched the satisfaction and follow up after a year. The results are very positive. Families and professionals are satisfied with the process and the results, the plans are mostly carried out and the circles remain involved and active!

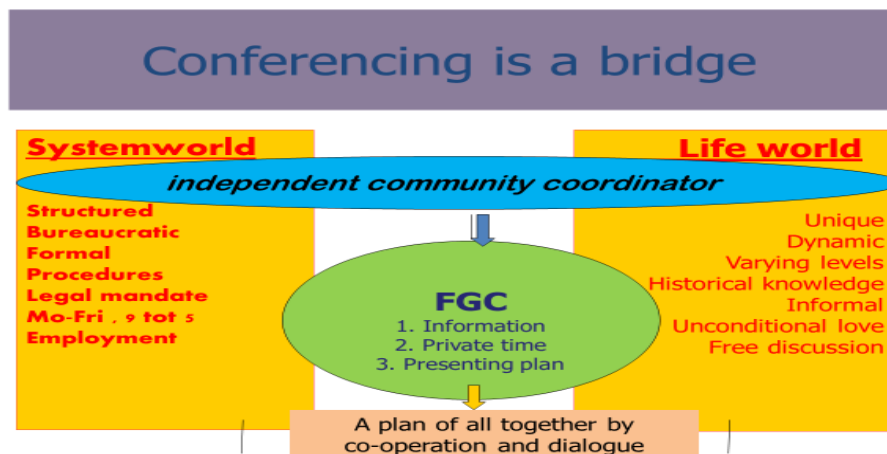
This year two long-term researches were finished: one rct-research on FGC in Child protection. The results were that FGC does not work better than the usual way of working. We had a lot of objections against the format of this research: rct does not fit the needs of FGC. In December the results will be published and we will publish an article with our point of view on this research.

The other research is of much more interest to us: it is about the current way of working at communities and the standard way of working of neighbourhood teams are compared with facilitating FGC's for Families. Results show that FGC is better at widening the circle and the plans of families last longer. It also shows that professionals underestimate the strengths and possibilities of families: when the problems seems to be complex a family-network meeting is not initiated. This research show that FGC's, even in very complex situations, are very well possible and that families are very capable of making safe and sound plans.



### PR-activities: Sharing experience and knowledge

A lot of good things happened this year. We started to share a FGC stories each week on Friday: so-called Friday-stories. A story about a conference, or a story of a child, a family member, a coordinator or a professional. We send this to the readers of our newsletter and share it on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. It helps to show some of our positive experience. But there still is a lot of work to do.



### Needs

Our wish is always that governments and professionals start to trust families more. That even in complex situation it becomes normal that we ask first who are involved, who thinks it is important that the child/ person is doing fine and that we give the whole circle the possibility to make their own plan.

We look forward to meeting our European colleagues to exchange stories, experiences and knowledge and to learn from each other!

Amsterdam, Oktober 2019,  
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