



## **FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE**

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

# **Briefing Paper on use of FGCs in NI 2014**

## **About FGCNI**

Family Group Conference (NI) is a new charity that evolved out of the Family Group Conference Forum (NI), which had been in existence for 16 years. As part of a planned developmental process, the Forum took the step to establish itself more formally, to enable it to continue to deliver on its vision of wider access to family group conferencing in Northern Ireland.

FGC NI's vision is 'Every citizen has the right to involvement in decision making that affects their family life and should be given the opportunity to exercise this right through Family Group Conference and Restorative Practices'.

As an independent charitable organisation, our aim is to promote an inclusive understanding of, and support for, Family Group Conference and Restorative Practice. This is achieved through 4 key objectives:

1. To extend and enhance quality Family Group Conference services in Northern Ireland, through provision of training and developmental opportunities
2. To lobby and influence key stakeholders
3. To share FGC and Restorative Practice, both locally and internationally
4. To provide regional infrastructure to support and deliver a quality service.

Uniquely – we can offer:

- Provision of a regional overview of FGC in Northern Ireland. We have a lobbying Subgroup which influencing government and local policy and practice.
- Provision of regional CPD opportunities for FGC co-ordinators and managers. We have trained and accredited over 70 co-ordinators and our current Programme has 16 attending.
- Facilitation of the collection and dissemination of regional information about services. We are working to produce a research proposal re outcomes of FGCs.
- Support for and promotion of the development of standardised good practice. We have developed FGC Standards for NI and work to promote these.
- Facilitation of useful dialogue among interested parties locally and internationally
- Apply for and receive funding from a range of charitable trusts and foundations, enabling FGC NI to resource vital work which adds value. We received funding this



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year to ensure we have appropriate governance arrangements in place as a newly constituted charity and continue to try and develop our fundraising skills.

- Development of pilot programmes, in partnership with other agencies, to provide Family Group Conference services directly, only where others are not doing so (e.g.) in geographical areas or client sectors that are unable to access services
- The last year has focused on consultation and a listening exercise with families, key stakeholders and our membership. We have called this “The Listening Project”. We plan to review the feedback and this will guide our work in the coming years.

## Use of FGCs in Family and Childcare in NI 2010 -2013

1. There are five organisations providing Family Group Conferencing Services to families across Northern Ireland. These are:
  1. Western Health & Social Care Trust FGC Service
  2. Northern Health & Social Care Trust FGC Service
  3. South Eastern & Belfast Health & Social Care Trust FGC Services
  4. Barnardos FGC Service provided under contract to the Southern Health & Social Care Trust
  5. Action for Children FGC Service provided under contract to the Health & Social Care Board for Hardiker Level 2 and below cases in part of the Western Health & Social Care Trust area.
2. The data used in this Briefing Paper has been collected by these services for the years 2010-2013.

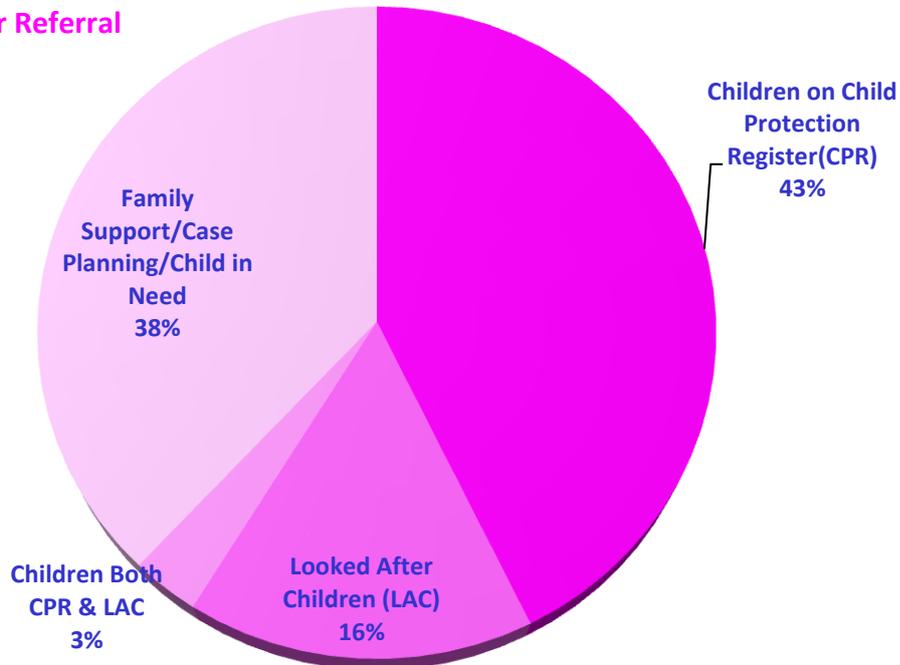
Total Referrals to FGC Services	1755
Number of FGCs held	1124
Number of FGC plans made by families	1123
Number of children/young people attending	1859
Number of Review FGCs held	423



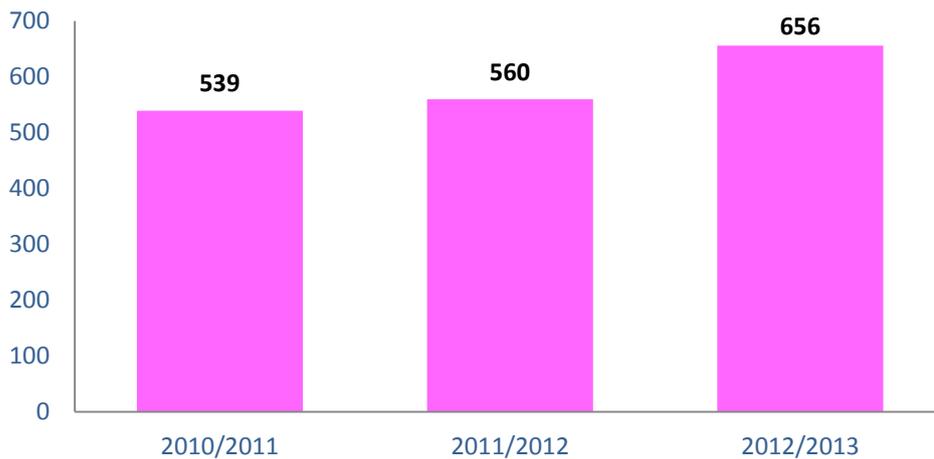
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### 3. Reasons for Referral



### 4. Demand for Family Group Conference services has grown. See chart below which the increase in referrals made in the last three years.



### 5. Services are working with increasing complexity in the nature of the referrals and the primary focus has been on children at risk of harm or to prevent children coming into care because of family breakdown.



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6. 1123 Family Plans were made at a Family Group Conference and the majority of them have been accepted by the referring agents.
7. Initial outcomes from two services show that:
  - 121 children were *diverted from Care*
  - 111 *Looked After Children returned home* to their families
  - 189 children were offered *family placements*
  - 134 children *avoided being placed on the Child Protection Register*
  - 157 children on the *CPR had a safe plan* with additional family input agreed
  - 31 young people 16+ were assisted in *preparation for independent living*
8. 1859 Children and young people attended their own Family Group Conferences and this has a positive impact for them.
9. The participation of children and young people has been excellent and their evaluations tell us that they feel that their voice was heard and they were encouraged by the high number of family members who attended their conferences to offer support.
10. In the last year there has been severe financial constraints which has resulted in a lot of pressure on the Projects. Despite this there has been ongoing work and a shift in focus to early intervention work as well as beginning to look at using the model with vulnerable adults, older people and where there are mental health issues.

### 11. **Use of FGCs in Family and Childcare in NI 2014 –current update on some Services.**

FGC Service Western Health and Social Care Trust

*“This year particular energy has been directed at the rolling out of our Early Intervention Protocol. To this end key stakeholders were visited with the aim of raising awareness of the protocol. We emphasised the effectiveness of Family Group Conferencing when it is involved in the early stages of a family’s presenting problem and encouraged referrals at this point. It is satisfying therefore to note that our referrals from Gateway have increased almost 50% as a result, and a number of these cases have been closed following FGC. Gateway cases that are transferred to FIS for further social work support do so with an increased level of safety established as a result of the FGC. That is the good news, on a less optimistic note the Trust is looking at areas where savings can be made and these are extremely uncertain times for support services – familiar ground but unsettling.”* Berna Harley FGC Project Manager



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**FGC Service South Eastern and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust**

*“Adult Safeguarding pilot*

*South Eastern Trust was fortunate to receive funding for a year from the Social Work Strategy Innovation fund to pilot FGC in Adult Safeguarding. This covers the safeguarding spectrum from promoting welfare to protecting from harm.*

*The process is considered when:*

- *There are safeguarding concerns - may or may not be currently going through formal safeguarding procedures - therefore preventative or reactive*
- *Consider the possible use of FGC at various stages in the safeguarding process. This should be discussed with the Designated Officer who has overall management responsibility for the adult safeguarding response.*

*Alongside the safeguarding concerns there might also be one of the following:*

- *Family members / carers are expressing concerns*
- *The service user is reluctant to engage with services or accept intervention*
- *Family are in dispute with health and social care services about what needs to happen*
- *A complex ‘Best Interest’ decision is required. There may be a dispute between those involved*
- *One or more family members is vulnerable, i.e., service user is also a carer or perpetrator of abuse has a disability/ MH issue / vulnerability*

*The Trust will produce a final report on the pilot in January 2015*

*Edge of Care project*

- *Family Group Conference service will provide support to the Belfast Trust Edge of Care project. An FGC will be offered to every family where there is a potential for the young person to be admitted to residential care. It is hoped that this would reduce the risk of family breakdown and provide Family driven solutions. “*

*Lesley Mackie FGC Project Manager*

**Mena Wilson**  
**Chair Family Group Conference NI**  
**Briefing Paper for European Network Italy November 2014**