

The 5th Annual European Family Group Conference Network Event

**November 08th – 10th, 2007
Hotel Centre Français - Berlin, Germany**



**Hosted by
the Children Welfare Office (bureau Berlin Mitte)**

Minutes

The following are just some of the key points that were shared at the event, and should not be seen as a comprehensive account of all the developments that have taken place within any given country.

The information below is set out in order of presentation and time frame.

Opening / pre meeting: November 08th

Informal meeting with coffee and tea at the centre francais for everybody who had already arrived. Later on dinner together and then a walk through some parts of Berlin for those who wanted to come along.



Day 1: November 09th

I. Start and welcome by moderator Heike Hör

II: Opening lecture

Prof. Dr. Frank Früchtel: FGC: Community instead of colonialization

More information: see attachment I



III. Country Presentations



Netherlands

Overview

“Eigen Kracht” being their FGCs – it means “own strength”. Started around 2000. Ideology and goal is to maximise the control of citizens over their own live.

There are three implementation strategies – 1. Do as many FGCs as possible, as to get as much stories / information and experience as possible; 2. Get organisations to follow the ideal “You come first” to the families and 3. Put FGCs into the law (change the law), so that people in need can use their own strength and resources first.

The satisfaction rate of the FGCs is very high, on average each coordinator gets rated with an 8 or 9. On average, there are 14 people in an FGC, and about 18 points (plans) in an average plan. Of these 18 points, 80 % are agreements in the family, and 20 % are questions requests towards professionals.

Currently, there are about 300 coordinators (facilitators), all being volunteers. This is very good since there is a big variety of professions available / represented.

Challenges

It is an exciting time at the moment. Politicians can say things and also put them into writing, but the change in professional thinking still has to come.

A big challenge and goal is to bring FGC into every providence.

Also, the goal is to implement FGC into other fields of work, e.g. when working with handicapped people, people after being released from jail etc.

Also, a key thing is to implement FGC into schools of different professions – since every profession is trained differently (social work, police etc.)

Research

The ministry asked for research as to find out if FGCs would collide with the law. This is not the case, since the law firmly states that citizens and families should be asked and worked with first before interventions are ordered. So actually the way of traditional practice – the strong professional dominance – is against the law.

Some research has shown that even in providences where FGC works well some social workers “forget” to offer it to families, because as they themselves said the method is “not in their own system / heads yet”.

Proud of

In one providence FGC has been made mandatory to be offered first and to everybody.

Last spring the 1000th FGC was been held and this was a reason for everybody to celebrate and a good thing to show off.

Also, the national NGO of Eigen Kracht has been nominated for the award for social company of the year this year.

Usage

In Child care & protection, school drop outs

Next year

The minister of Youth has included FGC into his new programme, though not with funding.

Further Information

A dvd was made, which is available for 15 Euros and in different languages.



Russia

Overview

The policy of the Russian state is changing – in his annual speech Putin has now for two years already addressed family policy in Russia. This resulted in that the regions are wanting to work closer with families. The first FGC pilot project was done in 2004, but / and the region is still new with FGC. The idea of FGC itself is not a new one, since in earlier centuries the family council was the traditional and normal concept / way to deal with problems and issues. This does not include the ideas and wishes of the children though. About 2 – 3 presentations are being held each month as to promote FGC further and get the information and background across.

Challenges

To include the will, wishes and ideas of the children more effectively. Also, there is the wish to implement FGC into more fields of work, not only Child welfare – implementation into projects with handicapped people, drug abuse, Youth home projects etc.

Funding

SOS Norway and the Nordic council of ministers

Proud of

Russia and especially the pilot projects are proud of their perseverance in promoting FGC and in their will not to give up and to go on with their programmes.

Networks

It is vital that the work is closely connected to and in the frameworks of the legislation for it to be successful. In practice it was noticed that a lot of sceptical questions were asked about the methods, and close cooperation can resolve these questions more easily and successfully. In the last 8 months there has been close work with the governor of the region. A protocol of intentions has been set up with FGC in it. There has also been an agreement with the committee of social affairs, that when concerning cases of juvenile affairs the committee has the information and passes it on so as FGCs can be set up.



Germany

Overview

Since last year's conference there has not been that spectacular a change in FGC in Germany, but the implementation is going forward step by step. In October this year the first national network meeting with about 40 people was held in Münster.

Goal for Berlin Mitte is to hold 40 FGCs in 2008. Social workers from the Child and Youth offices are excited about the FGCs and the role as a coordinator, but being coordinators is not really possible, since they are not given time for this job. So the second preference is to have coordinators that come from NGOs.

There is a strong wish to not only know FGC but to actually work with it more and more as to get more experience and standards for it.

At the moment everywhere, where FGC is being introduced it has the status of a project and is going on in six federal states in Germany.

Challenges

The biggest challenge is to promote and achieve a change in social worker's attitudes and thoughts towards their clients. Also, there is the challenge to find some kind of financing plan that works.

Funding

Very experimental, always different and from a lot of different pots – just to find some way to get the money.

Issues

A big issue for everybody is how to implement FGC structurally, how to find methods to do so. The law on Child welfare in Germany is written very well, but in the end it is always the decision of the social worker as to what will be going on. So it is very important to get through to the social workers and their current attitude for FGC to be successful.

There are also a lot of specific questions that arise, such as how can we implement FGC with a broad effect? But what is a successful FGC? A need to find and define common standards concerning the method of FGC and the qualification of the coordinators. What about the long term effects of FGC? How do we define sustainability of a family plan? What kind of changes for the work of social workers are necessary to recognize?

Usage

In the youth welfare system as well as in a project for youths dropping out of school called "Second chance". It is also used in foster care and in the field of youth juveniles.

Networks

National FGC network.



Scotland

Overview

Have had 995 FGCs so far, last year 240 were held. In two districts FGC is mandatory.

FGC is overall very well established . At the moment the discussion evolves around the question whether FGC should even be made mandatory – it being mandatory does not necessarily make the method / process better and there is the danger of it becoming rigid, unflexible and too bureaucratic when being fully integrated into the system.

Also there is a debate going on about who the coordinators are supposed to be, if they should rather be professional coordinators or rather members of the local community.

For the future it is important to keep the enthusiasm for and over FGC up in each new debate.

Research

It has shown itself that FGC works better with new cases / families. It is harder with families that have a long history with welfare and problems.

Issues

In addition to the debates that are being named in the overview there are thoughts going on around the question of “How are the coordinators seen as by the families? Are they being seen as independent?”

Proud of

Proud of their Scottish system – it is a child hearing system. It has it's own specific relatively new legislation of / for children and very little big intervention.

Further Information

See given handouts



England

Overview

The present NGO promoting family empowerment in social care is promoting FGC as one of their methods. It also functions as a centre point for the FGC network in England – about 50 % of the local authorities are running FGCs already. This includes authorities which use FGCs frequently as well as authorities which only use FGCs rarely.

Main focus at the moment is given to lobbying and therefore persuading the government to implement FGC into the legislation. In a recent review FGC was already included as a recommendation for best practice – meaning that the courts can / will question the actions of the local authorities whether they used FGC or not. This fact though does not only bring the good: because of this recommendation especially in London a lot of referrals for FGC are being

made in a sort of rush rush way, they are supposed to “just be done with” before the upcoming court date of the young person.

Very new is the accreditation of FGC – a post-graduate degree can be done at the university of Chester and tutors are going into the FGC world, which can independently evaluate.

Challenges

Currently there is work on working with the different professional groups – lawyers, social workers etc. – as to provide and keep the integrity of the model.

There is also a struggle currently on applying and implementing FGC in the adult work. Research and financing are positive, but the embedding seems to need more help.

Also, there seems to be little on FGC with black minorities – astonishingly, since FGC was developed in work with a minority group. FGC is being used with families of black minorities, concerning issues on social care, education, migration, and research is going on at the present, which will be published in 2008.

Research

Currently there are thoughts and debates on the two sides of FGC – FGC as a right of every family to have versus FGC a method that is being imposed on the family by professionals

On the FGC England webpage there is provided a document of guidelines for downloading, which can guide other professions, especially courts as to the idea and background on FGC, so that they know how to use as well as what to expect from FGC.

Also a book on FGC is in the make, by Paul Nixon and others, which is to come out next year. The book will outline the ethos and principles of FGC as well as how the method is able to fit into different situations.

Proud

In the area of Kent FGC is mandatory in the child welfare section, a referral always has to be made.

Usage

Used in the child welfare section as well as in the field of low school attendance. Recently also being applied in the field of working with elderly and the field of working with young people with physical disabilities. There has also been an evaluation of this, which is available on the website.

Networks

International ties are very important for the FGC network in England. The national FGC website added a page for the European network, so that each country can fill it with their information.

Further Information

<http://www.frg.org.uk/>



Wales

Overview

FGC is being used all over Wales – from the 20 counties 17 are using FGC, or family group meetings as they are called there.

There are regular network meetings – four times a year, meeting in the North twice and twice in the South.

At the moment 4 – 5 tutors are starting to be trained as tutors for the coordinators. Also, Wales would love to do an exchange programme with other countries.

Challenges

One phenomenon that was noted was that social workers were sometimes practicing gateway keeping, and only offering FGC to certain / some families. The challenge now is to make everybody realize that FGC is a right for every family and that every family should be offered FGC.

Another challenge is to see that the principles of FGC are being upheld, and that the service users are able and allowed to contribute to the development. Following this path a Young Persons Group has been implemented, which will be asked about issues around FGC. This takes up a lot of time but helps a lot and is very good.

Funding

Mainly through the voluntary sector, NGOs. Basically, funding is “a nightmare”. There are a lot of different pots where money is coming out of, and there is a constant conflict around funding. As a result a lot of contracts are being made very short in time.

Issues

Keeping up the ethos of FGC

Usage

FGC is being used mainly in child welfare, youth offending etc. Also, there are self-referrals going on, not only referrals from professionals. In the field of restorative justice FGC is only at the beginning, but everybody is hopeful that it will spread.

Networks

Wales national FGC network



Slovakia

Overview

The NGO “Smile is a gift” is doing FGC in their work with foster care and adoption in their motto - “so that every child has a family”.

There are 8 regional branches in child welfare in Slovakia, so implementation of FGC is hard. The best way of implementation seems to be to work with the regional and governmental agencies. Also, Rob from the Netherlands came to Slovakia to train coordinators. At the moment there are about 40 coordinators. This past year, 12 FGCs were done – looking for personal resources is a challenge.

Smile is a gift is looking to get FGC mandatory and to be the NGO that is credited to do FGC. The ministry of social affairs is in favour of FGC, which is good.

Slovakia would like to host a conference.

Challenges

Build a national FGC network in which everybody that does FGC is involved – so that implementation and the message that FGC “is it” can be done more effectively.

A big challenge is the lack of confidence the families have in themselves. This seems to be aftermath from the long years of communism.

Another challenge is to find a place for the coordinators in the NGO, as not to provoke conflicts of roles between coordinators and social workers.

There seems to be a strong need for supervision of the coordinators.

Funding

By government as well as sponsorships from large companies.

Issues

Looking into the future FGC should be made a regular part of the planning process – the legislation at the moment states that a plan has to be made. Also, FGC should be implemented in every region, but the idea is to first have it in some regions and practice and work with the method, as to develop best practice examples. Also, there is a great need to speak and work with the governmental bodies on the local level.

Usage

Used not only in the child welfare section but also with minority groups like Roma .



Norway

Overview

There is a lot of research going on in Norway. The Nordic comparative research which includes 2004 – 2007 looks at the children’s perspective. The research-based principles to include children in the FGC process are published on the internet in English.

The Otago University is working with an Australian university as well as another Norway university on a research on community development, the strength perspective and child welfare. All of these have FGC in common. This started in 2005 and is being funded by the university. There is an effort to get more information from international research places.

The Nordic master module for social work includes FGC in its studies. With the European platform for international studies there is also connection with Italy, Sweden, Norway and Mallorca – FGC is a main part. Also, a woman in South Africa is working on her PhD, which will be on FGC and the process of FGC being implemented into the legislation.

Challenges

To get social FGC into the system.

Next year

Power point presentation on the implementation of FGC – the plan for the next 5 years, which has already been signed by the ministry.

Further Information

A book which is available for 10 Euros with articles on FGC from different authors – there are several articles in English.



Northern Ireland (NI)

Overview

FGC is being used since 1997 in the area around Belfast. In the Republic of Ireland FGC is already implemented in the legislation, not so in Northern Ireland yet.

FGC developed step by step and now there is a FGC forum. Members are both from Northern Ireland as well as the Republic of Ireland. This forum does a lot of lobbying and is meeting with the new key civil servants (there is a new government in Northern Ireland now).

There are three governmental services that do FGC as well as one NGO doing FGC – Bernardo's.

Challenges

FGC is not normally expected yet, but there is an atmosphere of change and the hope to overcome scepticism. There is resistance and no trust towards families and their ability to take care of their own children. Social workers are not keeping their ends of the plans. So a big challenge is to really get FGC into the minds of the professionals.

Issues

There is the governmental target of putting pressure on FGC as to use more FGC.

Usage

In child welfare and child protection, now also in youth justice. There is a wish to expand FGC into the work with young people in prison.

Networks

FGC forum. There is also an international conference going on this November in Ireland.

There are also links to the university of Belfast as to get some courses and lectures on FGC running.

Further Information

The FGC forum produced a DVD and has a website.



Sweden

Overview

FGC has been going on since 1995, and there were a lot of struggles on the way but it perceiving and the direction is positive.

Researchers in Sweden are not discussion FGC and do not support it.

Sweden finds that it is not great on lobbying, mainly because it has been concentrating more on the ground floor and municipal work. There are no NGOs which do FGC.

There are currently 15 municipals that are doing FGC, and there are annual national meetings as well as regional meetings. The coordinators are always independent, and never is a social worker and a coordinator in the same role. The coordinators are paid per hour, but some are also full-time.

Challenges

To get FGC into the present system, as to get a change in minds and attitudes.

There is a need to talk about and develop standards and principles of / for the coordinators, since there is a realisation of how more and more important this role is.

Also there is a big challenge of working with social workers on the principles that lie behind FGC, that this mentality is used and represented in all of social work. The goal is primarily in how one meets people, the method is a bit secondary.

A big challenge is in the picture that is being spread by the media, that social services are responsible for children and that they get the blame if something "goes wrong". There was a lot of shock when the idea, that families were in charge of their own children was voiced.

Issues

An important issue is to get social work to fit together, as not to have rivalry of different methods. The goal is to find an overall consensus in role and ideals of and in social work.

Usage

Widely used, in working with adults as well as youths).

Networks

International networking is very important. Also, it seems very hard to change large organisations. It seems that it might be easier to start change in smaller places and have it spread more and more.



Denmark

Overview

FGC has been practiced since 1999. All projects are implemented and FGC is promoted and accepted everywhere, bottom as well as top. But there is a gap between acceptance and the actual practical use. FGC is being guided by the law, which states FGC as a practical example of how to work with families. It is not clear where all FGC is being used, since there is no national network / management.

Soon there will be a new legislation which will stress the children's perspective as well as the need for cooperation with the families and the need for networking. The municipalities will have to find ways for cooperation and develop guidelines.

Challenges

To keep the spirits up on FGC.

Also, there is no organisation for / of the coordinators. This needs to be done to ensure the quality.

One difficulty is that there are not enough social workers in Denmark – currently there are around 1500 vacant places. There is also a lot of administrative work for social workers, and they are tired of documentation and paper work.

Research

There is a project going on together with Norway initiated by the ministry of refugees and integration on FGC and / with migration families around Copenhagen. This is supposed to be finished by 6/2009.

The national board of social services is working on the implementation of FGC and researching on implementation barriers.

Funding

Government

Usage

In Child welfare. There is also a pilot project on using FGC with children with learning disabilities in the time span that they come out of school as well as a pilot project with people who are being released from prison.

Further Information

There is a DVD which explains the steps of FGC, but it is currently only available in Danish.



Poland

Overview

In Poland children are moved into institutions very fast, even if they could stay with their families. FGC started in 2001, and in 2003 there was a training. But

since then there was a big gap since there was a need to look for and find funding, which was not successful.

Now a lot of organisations want trainings in FGC, as to look good. A lot have the training but are still not using FGC. So when organisations say they want the training they are first asked why they want the training.

Now, four projects are being developed. One of them was specifically requested by the ministry of labour, which asked to implement FGC into a specific field. It is funding the project.

Poland feels the need that it will need a lot of help from other countries as to be successful in FGC.

Challenges

To create a national organisation for FGC as to work on standards and for people and institutions to have a place to go to when they have questions etc.

Also, FGC is a big step for people. Up until now one was used that decisions were made over the heads of people, so this is a huge step.

Funding

There is a lot of funding by the EU now, so it is an interesting time for Poland. The country has to use the given money, so it is important and possible to use it for FGC.

Issues

To give information on FGC.

Networks

Cooperation with England, mainly because there is a feeling of insecurity concerning FGC.

IV: Workshops A

The technique used for this part of the conference was the Open Space - > this technique makes it possible for each person to move freely between each group if they wish to do so.

❖ Brainstorming: ideas for workshops



❖ Title of workshop: International co-operations

Discussion

The group looked at the decisions and actions that were talked about in Slovakia earlier in the year. It seems that an annual network meeting is good, but to have more support, especially for the countries where FGC is not very far yet more meetings seem to be necessary.

-> Does the European network want to stay informal as it is now? Or does it want to become formal?

Results and conclusions

There were three main ideas that will be followed:

1. components of collaborative projects between the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland with focus on implementation of FGC ("What are the right streams of funding to apply for?" etc.) – where are opportunities in this?
 2. Websites -> fill the existing European network website with information from each country and get link list, as to start a shared website for everybody.
 3. Conferences coming up: family empowerment conference in Birmingham, England and international conference in Slovakia.
- Idea: an FGC world conference in light of an upcoming UN anniversary?

❖ Title of workshop: How to have FGCs not become oppressive

Discussion

Talk around having coordinators coming from the community – pros to this is that one can draw in people from the background community itself or / and draw key community people into the FGC process. There was a strong liking of this idea in the group, but not too clear where to go from there.

Also the subject of where exactly FGC is implemented / rooted was discussed: pros and cons on mandates, funding ties and other ties etc.

The training of coordinators: who actually does the training at the moment?

Training manual is important. Material for this does exist. There is accreditation for coordinators going on in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – these have different stages though and are all a bit different.

Results and conclusions

The training of coordinators: training should be 3 days minimum. Supervision is very important, and national standards seem to be necessary and important to be established. Also the idea of coached FGCs came up as maybe a good idea, and there is a need to look at how the training of coordinators can / will be funded.

❖ Title of workshop: FGC implementation – revolutionary or subtle?

Discussion

Talks about “changing the system” – who can change the system? Politicians, Service users, professionals.

A main blockage is the common belief in society that people cannot solve their problems. Society is dependent and people like professionals “to take care of them”, it takes the responsibility off of them selves.

Question whether it is easier to make changes in smaller towns – not really, so this approach is not the answer either.

Important question to think further: how to publicise FGC in the open?

Discussion on the duty of families to bring in their own resources.

Results and conclusions

Keeping the traditional way of working / thinking parallel to FGC is not an option.

Also the realisation that FGC principles will always be at odds with society.

It is important to also look at the people that make the referrals and train these people.

When customers ask for FGC, give it to them!

Idea: do some kind of PR in 2009 in Amsterdam – the UN Human Rights division will be celebrating their anniversary, wonderful opportunity to see FGC as the method for children’s rights.

Day 2: November 10th

V: Next meeting(s)

For the next meeting there was a discussion on whether it should be on the back of the conference being held in Birmingham, England on family empowerment in 2008 or if it should stay in the format it is now, being its own separate European network meeting in November.

The idea for meeting on the back of another conference was mainly that there are a lot of meetings, conferences etc. and it might be easier for people to arrange their participation when the dates are together. The idea of keeping the current format is that this way there is more in depth time and focus on the issues themselves and the topics and intentions are clear. FGC does not seem to be established enough and the network needs some more alone time. The difference between conferences and network meetings was voiced. After voting there was a clear sign that most people favour sticking to the current format.

The next meeting will take place in Glasgow, Scotland. The suggested date is November 6th to 8th, 2008.

There will be a network meeting on implementing FGC in work with adults which will also be in November in Scotland. Scotland will find out the dates of this network meeting as to make sure it won't overlap with the suggested dates. Then Scotland will send a date confirmation email to everybody. Dates to be used if there should be overlapping will be either November 13th – 15th or November 20th – 22nd.

VI: Workshops B



❖ **Title of workshop:**

The role of the coordinator / what do the family plans look like?

Discussion

Talks on the different ways of how the family plans look like – huge difference among the countries: some plans are typed, some written, the person that writes the plan varies etc. Also, some countries expect the organisations and professionals that are named in the family plans send a written response.

Results and conclusions

The plans are a very important part of FGC, especially for the workers that are in the plan – this includes the children, so they need the plan too (ideas around laminating plans).

Also, the fact that principles were changed / corrected by practice was interesting: a lot of families voiced that they rather not want a coordinator that is from their country / culture.



❖ **Title of workshop: FGC with minority families**

Discussion

Astonishingly for everybody there is not a lot of research / writing on this topic. Especially England is trying to “get back on track” with this.

Lengthy discussion evolved around the usage of interpreters: there seems to be a sort of panic amongst social workers / coordinators, and interpreters are pulled into the process very fast. But there are not only strengths but also a lot of challenges when working with interpreters.

The group also looked at different values of peoples, and at the key issues shame and rejection, which seem to be found often.

There was also talk on the child’s perspective being a key part in FGC, and working with families from cultures where child participation is not really practiced – how this can be combined so that it fits for everybody.

Results and conclusions

Food and religious beliefs play an important part in the FGC process, even more: they help the process.

It is also very important to remember and work with the fact that different peoples express themselves differently. These expressions must be allowed, there must be given room for these. But there also is the issue that some ways of expression can be scary for the coordinator when he is not used to this way or does not know what to expect / doesn't have enough background information. There is a lot of fear and jumpiness around other cultures. The issue of integration, which comes up pretty much all of the time should be valued but should not be guiding the whole process – it should not take overhand.

Sameness and difference walk hand in hand – families are basically all the same, but each family is different.

It was also recognised that there are a lot of leaflets and flyers and DVDs etc. – it seems that there is enough available, so it might be smarter to use each others material than to keep making new material, which is expensive. A good idea would be a list of DVD's – this can happen through the new European network website.

Basically, the key to all of this is a very skilled and well prepared coordinator.

❖ **Title of workshop: international co-operations – second part**

Discussion

Taking another look at the European network – where does it stand at the moment, where does it want to go and where is it going at the moment, what are people getting out of it, especially in terms of support.

Arising question: movement of promotion? Promoting the right of citizens to have a hand in their own lives. How can the network reach out?

Talk on if and if so how to formalize the network – the more formal it gets the more risks and dangers are there that it will get too structural and bureaucratic.

Practical questions:

- Building up contacts for support
- meetings in Slovakia?
- European network website
- build up guidelines? As a possibility for countries to the “sign up” for these basic principles, and also helpful for those who are trying to establish FG

Results and conclusions

Idea of doing a global FGC conference in 2009, including not only countries from Europe but also others – opportunity to celebrate FGC as well as to convince people of it. For this it would also be good to cooperate with restorative justice.

Important: try to implement a kind of steering group / organisation committee with the key organisations that are already working on a global conference.



VII: additional information / agreements

❖ Preparation for meeting next year:

For next year's conference every country will have its country presentation already prepared before hand and also bring along a handout of one page with the most important information for everybody.

The presentation will be 5 minutes long and will be guided by the nine categories:

Overview

Challenges

Issues

Funding

Research

Usage

Networks

Next year / for the future

Further information

❖ Website:

FGC Website should be build up more – England has made a European FGC site, so every country can send their information, links etc. and then it will be put on to the website.



Protokoll: Elisabeth Koppitz, Bamberg
Moderation: Heike Hör, Stuttgart
Organisation: Andreas Hampe-Grosser, Berlin

Attachments

- attachment I
– lecture of Prof. Dr. Frank Früchtel
- attachment II
– more information for the country presentation of Scotland
- attachment III
– power point presentation from the country presentation of Norway
- attachment IV
– more information for the country presentation of Northern Ireland
- attachment V – email list of the participants