



FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING

Workshop held by Spring Consortium

26th January 2017 in London

In January 2017, the Spring Consortium ran a workshop focusing on the practice of Family Group Conferencing, bringing together a mixed group of representatives from local authorities, the Innovation Programme evaluation teams and representatives from the Department for Education to exchange learning about implementing Family Group Conferences (FGC) at scale.

An FGC is a mediated decision-making process led by family members and the child (including extended family members and even friends of the family) and facilitated by a specialist co-ordinator to develop a plan of action for a child who is deemed at risk. Seventy per cent of local authorities in England offer FGC and through that an alternative to child protection plans. Within the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, [Daybreak](#) and [Leeds](#) are delivering FGC at scale. You can find out more about Leeds in the [Programme storyboard](#).

Five key themes emerged from the workshop:

Importance of alignment of values of FGC with those of the service. A consistent theme of the day was the need for an explicit set of values to be part of the rationale for FGC, the promotion of FGC, and the overall agency services that link with and support FGCs. Participants felt it was impossible to implement FGC if the values of the service conflicted with this approach. Fundamental to FGC are the voice of the child being at the centre of decision-making, the acknowledgement of the role of the broader social network of the child (including parents, uncles/aunts and grandparents, for example) and the principle that a service should be as collegiate and respectful as possible with all family members.

Practical barriers to acknowledge in implementing FGC. It was clear that there were significant pressures in keeping true to the principles underpinning the FGC model. Imposed timescales, from procedures or legislation, could be difficult to accommodate and would need continuing review if the FGC is to be genuinely at the heart of decision-making. Practical issues, such as appropriate venues and travelling time to see family members outside the area, also need significant attention. Records systems, and 'who could see what', needed review to make sure they were consistent with the FGC approach.

Scaling and mainstreaming FGC. There is now significant knowledge about moving the model from the margin to mainstream services, and about expanding the work into different areas, such as Domestic Violence, for example. These developments raise issues of recruitment, salary levels, and training for co-ordinators, and making sure that existing staff do not feel threatened by the new developments. Expansion may also bring the need to focus on consistency across FGC teams and develop appropriate supervision and support models that can work across bigger and multiple teams.



Ensuring fidelity of FGC practice. In all, there were a series of continuing actions necessary to make sure FGC practice maintained consistent fidelity to the FGC model. These included substantial training and information for all appropriate staff so that they understood the model, and, crucially, why the values underpinning it were fully supported by the agency.

Impact measures. Building on past research and continuing to find ways to assess 'good decision-making' were challenges for the future, and the view of the workshop attendees was that the focus should be on five outcomes central to the welfare of the child or young person:

- stability of care;
- risk reduction and appropriate sharing of risk;
- well-being measures;
- the expansion of resources available for the child or young person; and
- the involvement and influence of the child or young person and family members.

What's next? Participants said they would like to continue having learning workshops in the future. The suggested focus of those will be:

- Consideration of specialised practice areas, including radicalisation, domestic violence, CSE and gangs.
- Continuing debate about impact measures that are appropriate for this decision-making model.
- 'Taking stock' events to understand the trajectory and development of FGC practice in Children's Social Care.

If you'd like to be part of the ongoing discussion and development of these ideas, email us at innovation@springconsortium.com

Spring Consortium