



## Re-imagining the child welfare system for the 21st century International conference hosted by Leeds City Council

23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016 in Leeds

In November 2016, Leeds City Council held a three-day international conference, entitled [Re-imagining the child welfare system for the 21st century](#), featuring world-renowned speakers on restorative practice from New Zealand, Canada and the USA. The Department for Education's Spring Consortium partners delivered a conference session to share some lessons from the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme as to what it takes to develop, test and scale innovative ideas in children's social care.

The three-day conference was opened by Nigel Richardson CBE, former Director of Children's Services at Leeds City Council. He introduced [Family Valued](#), the council's transformation project, which embedded [restorative practice](#) across all council services and developed [Family Group Conferencing](#) (FGC) as a core offer to families in a wide range of circumstances including domestic violence. A key goal was to change services' response to domestic violence, shifting from retributive to restorative ways of working with the whole family. The [new approach](#) to working with families is reflected in new ways of working with one another, including at a management level. Through large-scale training programmes, restorative practice is being embedded as the core ethos of working in Leeds.

Through presentations and interactive workshops the conference explored the following themes:

- Re-imagining the child welfare system for the 21st century.
- Working restoratively with families affected by domestic abuse.
- Working restoratively with families using Family Group Decision Making.
- Restorative inquiry – can it be done?

### ***Re-imagining the child welfare system for the 21st century***

Dr Moana Eruera from the Office of the Chief Social Worker in New Zealand presented how FGCs were used in New Zealand to develop a more culturally responsive child welfare system for the Maori population, whose children are disproportionately over-represented in the statutory children's social care system. FGC enabled them to facilitate use of Maori social structures like "members of the tribe", and enabled extended community to be involved in decision-making for Maori children.

### ***Working restoratively with families affected by domestic abuse***

Gale Burford, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of Vermont, shared some evidence on the benefits of using FGCs even in areas such as domestic abuse. Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group, and Sharon Inglis, Director of Circles Training and Consultancy complemented the presentation with practical examples of using FGCs with families in which domestic abuse occurred.

### ***Restorative inquiry – can it be done?***

Jennifer Llewellyn, Viscount Bennett Professor of Law at the Schulich School of Law, presented on how restorative practice is used in Nova Scotia, a Canadian province, to



examine the experience of former residents of the Halifax orphanage, and also more broadly on how restorative practice is used to address wider systemic discrimination and racism throughout the province. While a traditional public inquiry is focused on uncovering facts and laying blame a '[Restorative Inquiry](#)' enables everybody to understand not only what happened, but why it happened and why it matters for all Nova Scotians. The restorative inquiry into the Halifax orphanage was launched in 2015 and is still ongoing.

### **Other conference items**

Elaine Peace, a Spring Consortium coach, presented on lessons learned from the national Children's Social Care Innovation Programme about what it takes to innovate in children's social care. You can access the Spring Consortium [presentation](#) and the main conference [presentations](#).

Alongside the main conference programme there were also fringe events including artistic presentations from young people including FGC young people's service user groups, which demonstrated the benefits of FGC from a user perspective.

Spring Consortium