



FAMILY GROUP CONFERRING

Continuum Consulting Australia PTY. LTD.

WHAT IS A FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE?

A family group conference (FGC) operates by bringing members of a family group together to discuss a single family issue in relation to child protection. The meeting is conducted by a qualified facilitator, impartial to the child protection agency. The role of the facilitator is to make sure all participants are heard and to support the family in developing a plan that works for everyone. All who participate in a family group conference must be signatory to a final agreed plan.

WHAT MAKES A FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE EFFECTIVE?

Studies centred on the effectiveness of FGC have shown this style of problem-solving to have 'high participant satisfaction, offered more placement opportunities for children to live with extended family, improved communication within families, and established more respect among families for child protection professionals' (Department of Community Services, 2006).

ASSUMPTIONS

The family group conference model is based on the following assumptions:

- Families have a right to participate in decisions affecting them.
- If properly prepared and engaged with, families are competent decision makers.
- Decisions made within families are more likely to succeed than those imposed by outsiders.
- Decision making as a family cohort can improve communication and reduce hostility amongst the family system.
- Feelings of empowerment and respect are fostered by independent decision making (Huntsman, 2006).

WHO CAN BE INVOLVED?

Family group conferencing brings together three different parties, all offering unique insight & strengths to the issue being discussed. They are:

- 1) Immediate family.
- 2) Extended family and other important support people in the young person's life.
- 3) Child protection professionals who offer services that can assist with putting the plan in action.



Source by Changing Futures

WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



FGC first emerged in New Zealand as a response to the over representation of Maori children in the child welfare system. Like Maori culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities hold strong value around the concepts of family, extended family, and kinship. The FGC model seeks to involve the wider family system to promote long-lasting change.

STAGES OF FAMILY GROUP CONFERRING

STAGES

Family Group Conferencing *Families making decisions*

Preparation

- What is the purpose of the conference?
- What are the key issues?
- What are the strengths and formal/informal networks/resources in this situation?
- Who are the key persons to attend?
- Is restoration or well-being or relationship a consideration?
- Child inclusive practice (seeking the young person's or adult clients view).
- Bottom lines for decision-making (i.e. what is non-negotiable?).
- Options of support from community and professionals.

Meeting Stages

Venue conducive to relaxed participation

Information sharing

- Key questions listed (usually on a whiteboard).
- Facilitated discussion on key issues.
- Offers of professional/informal support.
- Equity lens on what assistance may the family need in engaging with agencies?
- Solutions explored.
- Will this solution work?
- Reality check:
 - ✓ What could go wrong?
 - ✓ What do you need?
 - ✓ What will it take to do this?

Family Private Time

- Family meet in private and make decisions.
- Solutions and plans developed.

Presenting Family Plan

- Plan presented.
- Negotiating and resourcing the plan.
- Agreement made.
- Key worker identified.
- Review time set.

WHAT MIGHT THE PLAN LOOK LIKE?

Family Questions to help develop the family plan				
•				
•				
•				
Decisions made by the family				
What will be done (Tasks)?	Who will do it?	When will they do it?	Who will check it has been done?	Date due