

FAMILY DECISION MAKING IN A CHANGING CONTEXT

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This paper is based upon the opening chapter to a book that we edited entitled *Family Group Conferences: Where Next? Policies and Practices for the Future* (Family Rights Group, 2007). The paper considers the context in which FGCs are being introduced, summarises the key principles of FGCs and how they are currently being applied and considers the wider implications for future policy and practice.



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FGCs embody a strong set of values about people. At the heart of FGC philosophy are political and social principles of respect for citizens, self-determination, democracy, collective responsibility and the importance of family relationships, culture and identity to children's lives.

The FGC model seeks to transform relationships between the State and families on matters concerning the care and well-being of children. FGCs originated in New Zealand with Maori groups inspiring and leading change as a response to oppressive practice and institutional racism from state agencies who sought to impose 'solutions' on families, and in doing so separated many children from their communities.

The use of FGCs is developing in all countries of the UK and in a range of locations internationally. Practice, law and policy are emerging

in a wide variety of social, cultural and political contexts (Burford and Hudson, 2000; Merkel-Holguin, et al., 2003; Nixon, et al., 2005). There has been a significant increase in the use of FGCs across a range of statutory and voluntary agencies, with FGC practice developing in areas such as child protection, services for young carers, adult mental health services, youth justice, in education and in addressing situations of domestic violence. In the book *Where Next*, the chapter authors explore some of the dilemmas of using FGCs in such situations and evaluate their effectiveness in these different contexts. In his chapter on youth justice FGCs, for example, Sean Haresnape considers the policy and practice dilemmas in blending restorative and welfare FGC processes to meet the sometimes conflicting needs of agencies, the courts, the victim, the young person and the family.

Despite the increasing use of FGCs, the implementation of FGCs in the UK remains patchy and there is still much to learn. The training and promotional work of the charity Family Rights Group has been partly responsible for the introduction of FGCs, together with the determination, innovation and leadership of practitioners and managers who have been convinced, often by personal experience, of the merits of the FGC model. The approach appears to have captured their imagination, perhaps because its core principles and process appear to reflect original social work and social justice values. Furthermore, FGCs provide a clear format for partnership with families that the Children Act 1989 and 2004 aspire to. The increasing interest in and use of FGCs, while proving to be a positive change, also present some significant challenges.

Empowerment, partnership and responsibility

‘Empowerment’ as a desirable goal for both social policy and social work practice has had increasing currency in recent years. Government interest in community participation, stakeholder consultation and social inclusion in a ‘share-holding democracy’ has signalled a renewed interest in both the empowerment of individuals and communities.

‘Partnership’ equally has become an important theme for contemporary child welfare services and a watchword within business and management theories. It informs the key processes on tackling social exclusion and ensuring that public services are linked to the

tenets of consumer choice and quality services. Together partnership and empowerment embrace the notions of user control and choice, which have become tenets of both the new left and new right political imperatives and helped to build a consensus that both are a 'good thing' (Rojeck, et al., 1988).

However, despite this apparent consensus, there are considerable tensions underpinning these goals. There is significant theoretical imprecision and disagreement about the nature of empowerment (Adams, 2003; Lupton and Nixon, 1999). Furthermore there are ideological struggles over the politics of empowerment, ranging from new right values of self-sufficiency and self-help and freedom from state interference, to liberal and social democratic ideals of the entitlement of citizens to support and services.

The context in which the FGC model is being introduced will determine the meaning attached to words like empowerment. Within a context where resources and services are being cut or there is a lack of senior management commitment to FGCs, the model can be reduced to a procedure that is concerned with 'gate-keeping', regulation or social control, instead of community building and participation through decision making. Thus, for different political groups, the concepts of responsibility and empowerment can potentially have both liberating and regulatory functions (Baistow, 1994/5; Lupton, 1998; Lupton and Nixon, 1999).

Given that empowerment may mean different things to different people, it is difficult for practitioners and policy makers to translate theories into action. If one defines empowerment as the action 'to take power' rather than 'to give power', then social workers cannot empower others; this is something people have to do for themselves. But practitioners and services can create opportunities, environments and relationships that may help make people more ready to take power themselves.

To date, the discourse on FGCs in the UK has largely focused on good practice and effective implementation. Less attention has been paid to people's rights as citizens to lead decisions directly affecting their lives. Arguably the continuing professional call for more evidence of the efficacy of the FGC model (although there is plenty of evidence to support its effectiveness) could be equated to asking that democracy prove itself, in research terms, before we believe it is a good idea.

At the point when children are most at risk of becoming subject to state control or when parents are most at risk of losing care of their children, shouldn't state agencies work even harder to ensure that children's and families' rights to have a say and influence decisions are upheld? This is one of the reasons that Family Rights Group was created. In the context of statutory social work, ensuring families have the right to an FGC before key decisions are taken out of their hands appears to be one clear way of upholding their right to family life and their right to be treated with dignity, and allowing them as citizens to voice their opinions when significant decisions are made that affect their lives.

FGCs enable families to take responsibility for key decisions. When decision-making responsibilities are taken by families with FGCs, there has been a consistently high level of consensus over the decisions made, in both child welfare and youth justice contexts (Thomas, 1994; Lupton, et al., 1995; Lupton, et al., 1997; Marsh and Crow, 1998; Jackson, 1998; Merkel-Holguin, et al., 2003). Conversely, if family members are not fully included as decision makers, a lack of commitment to the plans made by professionals seems likely and can be misinterpreted by the professionals as a lack of family commitment to the children. The inevitable effect is to create a cycle of mistrust and misunderstanding that has a corrosive effect on relationships between families and professionals. Despite legislative intent and support from research and best practice, family involvement in orthodox systems has been hard to achieve. Research evidence has shown over a long period that real partnership with families has been conspicuously absent in practice (DH, 1991; Thoburn, et al., 1995; DH, 1995; Bell, 1999; Freeman and Hunt, 1998; Doolan, et al., 2004).

Historically, the terms and conditions of partnerships between families and statutory agencies have been preset by the professional agenda. The extent of family involvement relies heavily on the actions of social workers and managers (Ryburn, 1991). Children and families may experience their participation as being 'managed', often to the requirements of the organisation rather than their own wishes. However, enhancing the participation of families does not necessarily mean that professionals lose their *power*, which they retain through the courts and through the control of information

and resources. FGCs do, however, provide greater opportunities for *power sharing*.

FGCs alone will not, of course, address the multiple causes or manifestations of exclusion. Families in the child welfare system often experience poverty with restricted opportunities, limited life chances and choices over their lives. With restricted access to housing, employment, education, leisure, nutrition and health care, many children and families are already marginalised in society (Preston, 2005; Gregg, et al., 1999). Discrimination and the impact of social divisions and isolation for some groups have made the possibility of inclusion even more remote. If we really want to enhance the participation, safety, citizenship and dignity of all children and their families, then wider social, political and economic changes are required that go far beyond social work services.

Nevertheless, the growing interest in FGCs reflects an increasing recognition that working collaboratively with families within and outside statutory social work services can assist families to take responsibility for their lives and their children's needs, and can ease the tensions between the role of families and the State in the upbringing of children.

Are family group conferences different to orthodox social work practice?

The origins of the contemporary FGC model tell us it is something different from orthodox UK social work practice. Inspired and led by New Zealand Maori people as a response to institutional racism, the approach was predicated on challenging the orthodoxy of state control and putting decision making back in the hands of families and communities. The early discourse on FGCs in the UK focused on notions of family empowerment, partnerships between families and social workers, promoting culturally sensitive practice, and enhancing family responsibility in decision making (Ryburn, 1994; Morris, 1995; Morris and Tunnard, 1996). All of this was underpinned philosophically by a belief in a family support and a rights and social justice-based approach to working with children and their families.

In New Zealand, the FGC model embodied radical legal change that was designed to re-conceptualise the relationship between the family and the State on care and protection and youth justice matters.

By contrast, FGCs in England and Wales developed as a good practice construct that may eventually influence legislative change. In both New Zealand and in England and Wales local differences have led to variations in practice (Thornton, 1993; Lupton and Stevens, 1997). There are, however, some core common elements to the FGC as follows:

- It is a decision-making meeting.
- The family is defined broadly to include extended family and friendship networks.
- It is facilitated by an independent co-ordinator.
- Families have private discussion time.
- Plans should be agreed if safe and should be resourced.

FGCs should be used when there is a need for a decision — after all, it is a decision-making process and it is important that the FGC is given decision-making powers and not used as a rubber stamp for professional ideas or plans.

The FGC process has three main phases:

1. Referral and preparation

Referrals can come from a variety of sources but most commonly from social workers. The referrals are usually made when a crisis has emerged, such as a breakdown in a child's placement or an incident of child abuse where decisions have to be made about the child's future.

Referrals are given to an independent co-ordinator who has the task of finding out which people are involved in the child's network. The co-ordinator will 'map out' both the 'family', which will include extended family and friends, and any professionals who are relevant to the decision making. A significant period of time (normally three to five weeks) is spent preparing family and professionals for the FGC — helping them focus on the child's needs, putting aside conflicts and thinking about how they will get what they want from the meeting. The family leads the decision making on arrangements for the meeting, the time and venue, as well as negotiating with the co-ordinator who will attend. Certain people may need to be excluded from the FGC, but exclusions are rare and need to be clearly justified. Every effort should be made to enable the views of anyone excluded to be known in the decision-making process.

2. The conference

The conference itself has three distinct parts:

- **Information sharing:** Professionals and family members meet, with usually more family members than professionals present, to share information, offer their perspectives and describe their concerns for the child. The co-ordinator facilitates the meeting and ensures clear information is provided by professionals, who set out the basis for the referral, share their assessments with the family and describe what services and resources could be called upon. Information is presented in the chosen language of the family and family members are encouraged to ask questions and clarify points. The professionals then leave the meeting.
- **Private family time:** A defining moment in the FGC is where the family group is left in private to discuss the problems raised and to create their own solutions based on their own knowledge and the information they have been given. Family members draw on their experience, history, culture and own problem-solving approach. They have as much time as they need. No record is made of private discussions; the only points recorded are decisions that form the basis of the plan.
- **Agreeing plans:** The family may ask the co-ordinator back into the meeting to assist them to write up their plan. The plan is then presented to the referrer and the professionals for their agreement, which they should give unless the proposal places the child at risk. Resources and plans for monitoring and review are negotiated. If a plan is not safe for the child, the family group is asked to rethink, but in the rare event that the professionals can still not agree, the matter goes to another decision-making forum, e.g. a child protection conference or the family court for resolution.

3. Follow-up and review

Initial FGCs are usually followed by reviews or follow-up meetings where the FGC reconvenes to look at how plans are working and to make any necessary changes or adjustments.

The Family Group Conference toolkit — a practical guide for setting up and running an FGC service (Ashley, et al., 2006) considers in detail the FGC process, including the roles and responsibilities of all involved.

Family group conferences — the challenges for policy and practice

FGCs were introduced into New Zealand through primary legislation in 1989. They were initially piloted in England and Wales in the early 1990s. More than a decade later, we now have a significant body of practice knowledge and research evidence about FGCs. The philosophy and ethos underpinning the FGC model remains strong; however, how these are systematically applied in practice, how they evolve and, critically, how they fit with or challenge organisational cultures, policies and practice needs close attention. The rest of this paper does not attempt to provide answers, but instead raises questions and dilemmas.

Which families are offered a family group conference and do services match families' requirements?

The FGC is designed to enable each family to make decisions in line with their own culture and traditions. The 2005 and 2007 Family Rights Group surveys of FGC network projects found that although practice varied considerably between FGC services, it appeared that black and minority ethnic children were under-represented among those families who were offered or received a FGC service, compared with their representation in the care population. Gate-keeping by referrers, inconsistency across agencies, as well as the lack of FGC projects in some large English cities can partially explain this inequality, but we need to question further what other barriers exist. In addition to the lack of access to FGCs, there is also a lack of culturally sensitive services (Barn, et al., 1997; Richards and Ince, 2000; Husain, 2005), which will limit the effectiveness of any plans drawn up at FGCs by black and minority ethnic families.

Despite their effectiveness at preventing harm, are family group conferences still just a bolt-on?

There is growing evidence that the support needs of parents and the safety of their children are interconnected (CSCI, 2006). The practice of strengthening social supports as a means of providing a buffer to individuals against the negative effects of crisis is well documented (Cobb, 1976). Conversely, Moncher (1995) found strong links between social isolation and limited social ties with increased incidents of child maltreatment.

With the practice of FGCs, family connections are strengthened and extended family members are far more likely to be involved in offering support to their kin than with traditional approaches. This was evident in a study by Marsh and Crow that looked at 80 FGCs in England and Wales, where families offered some level of support in 94% of FGCs and in 31% of cases family members offered to look after the children on a temporary or permanent basis (Marsh and Crow, 1998).

Marsh and Crow's research found that children were considered to be better protected by FGC plans (none worse) and there are indications of reductions in re-abuse rates compared with other approaches (Crow and Marsh, 1997; Marsh and Crow, 1998). This may be because the FGC model breaks the power of secrecy and allows families to use their knowledge, skills and networks for the protection of the child.

Yet despite the strong push in England and Wales to move services away from reactive, investigative models of intervention to ones that are more proactive and supportive to families, it has been a major challenge for agencies to refocus services to be more family friendly and inclusive. Why? Arguably, anxiety about the need for professional control and a prevailing culture of risk aversion, rather than risk management, mean that agencies have 'experimented' in developing family support initiatives (e.g. FGC pilot projects) as an add-on to existing mechanisms. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that consequently these initiatives are often the first to go when budgets need to be cut.

Should family group conferences operate alongside other decision-making processes?

FGCs currently operate among a raft of other decision-making models, including administrative child protection systems, statutory reviews and the court process. This can mean that at times FGC plans are diluted and decisions transmuted into suggestions or ideas for professionals to use, or worse still ignore.

Unless the culture of the organisation and of the professionals working in the agency reflects the ethos underpinning the FGC model, families most likely will get contradictory and potentially undermining messages about the nature of the working relationship they have with professionals.

In 2006 the UK Government conducted a Review of the Child Care Proceedings System in England and Wales. ¹ Family Rights Group sat

on the stakeholder group, putting forward evidence of the beneficial impact of FGCs on children's lives. As a consequence the subsequent revised government guidance ² to assist local authorities in preparing and commencing applications for care orders and the Public Law Outline ³ which is a new protocol for judicial case management in public law proceedings, encourages the use of FGCs and recommends that all family and friends care options should have been explored before care proceedings are started. Whilst this is extremely welcome and is having a noticeable impact in the behaviour of some local authorities, there are questions as to:

- a. whether this will be sufficient to change local authority practice earlier on, particularly among the more risk-averse authorities;
- b. what scope there is for FGCs to be utilised to streamline or replace existing statutory administrative decision-making processes; and
- c. whether and how FGCs can be effectively utilised if child-care proceedings need to be initiated.

These questions are being explored in depth at the international conference on family-centred solutions that Family Rights Group is hosting in England in September 2008.

Should holding a family group conference be an entitlement for families where children are at risk of compulsory state intervention?

The UK Children Act 1989 acknowledges that families should first be supported to make decisions as to how they will care for and safely protect their children. Only if they are unwilling or unable to do so should the State intervene against their wishes. It would follow the intention of the law then that at critical points families should be offered a FGC before their wishes and choices are overtaken by state agencies or the courts.

The development of FGC projects in England and Wales has to date been based upon a permissive legislative framework, in which the ethos is consistent with the Children Act 1989. FGCs are also used in specific safeguarding contexts that have been highlighted as effective

practice in the government guidance set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (DfES, 2006).

The approach taken to date in the UK sits in contrast to the New Zealand or Irish models of prescriptive legislation, which clearly mandates that a family has a right to a FGC where the State intervenes or proposes to do so.

Whilst the Public Law Outline means that some judges may require local authorities in England and Wales to justify why an FGC has not been held prior to a care order application being initiated, the reality remains that in the main whether or not families are offered an FGC is still largely dependent upon whether there is an FGC service in their area; and if there is, whether they meet the agency's referral policies (as well as relying on the awareness and attitude of the professionals involved). Yet the FGC process helps families and professionals seek consensus and common ground to resolve problems facing children. In contrast, the largely adversarial system of the court process can accentuate differences and may lead to a delay in decision making as well as polarised decisions. The effect of court-led decisions can, after all, be to move the people who are most affected by the decision further away from the decision-making process.

Senior decision makers at national and local levels have publicly acknowledged that more needs to be done to prevent cases unnecessarily reaching care proceedings. A small but growing number of local authorities and agencies in England have clearly stated policies that families should be offered an FGC before child care proceedings are initiated. The Public Law Outline, introduced in April 2008 is a step in the right direction and may become a more significant tool as more judges are educated about the FGC model. However, such steps although welcome are in themselves not a total panacea; if professionals have already determined what course of action is required for the child, e.g. adoption, going through the motions of an FGC in order to comply with procedures may be little more than a token process.

How should we measure whether the family group conference is a success?

In establishing and developing FGC projects, the motivation of the agency or those driving the implementation is likely to be fuelled

by a commitment to the FGC ethos. But there may also be other drivers, such as reducing budgets or meeting locally or nationally driven performance targets, for example reducing the applications for care orders. Although FGCs may achieve these objectives — after all there are plenty of examples of FGCs that have saved the local authority significant sums, for example by averting contested care proceedings — the real difficulty emerges when these factors become the key determinant for the agency as to whether or not the FGC is a success. A family and friends placement not being identified as part of the plan for the child, for example, could mean that the agency views the FGC as a failure because it does not meet the agency's target, yet, judged in its own right, the FGC may have made the right decision for the child and thus could be regarded as a success. Perhaps more work needs to be done in agencies to ensure that effectiveness is judged by the criteria set by children and their families and not just the demands of the agency.

Are services tailored to meet families' needs or do they reflect organisational convenience?

In order that professionals can use FGC plans as the basis or focus of their work with the child and the family, they need to have the flexibility to use resources and budgets in a way that is tailored to the family's requirements. If this does not happen, families may be placed in the invidious position of having decision-making responsibilities without the delivery of resources that the FGC plan has relied on to safeguard the child. We would expect that over time services would offer more provision of practical and family-centred support, reflecting the priorities of families rather than the historical patterns of agency services.

Are family plans integrated into strategic and budget planning?

If services are to truly reflect and respond to the diverse requirements of children and their families, they need to build upon the knowledge and experiences of local communities, especially the most socially excluded groups. In addition to the direct engagement of children and families in service design, family plans provide an important source of information at an individual and strategic level on which services are

required. The systematic recording of FGC requests for services and non-available services could be mapped to create information and data about practical and useful services as defined by users. These could in turn inform local strategic and service plans and help shape future budget planning both within and between agencies. Our concern, however, is that currently there is little evidence that authorities are taking advantage of this rich source of information to inform their planning and budget setting.

Whose family group conference is it?

In some sense the answer should be straightforward — the FGC is for the child or children at risk or whose welfare needs to be addressed.

Yet, different countries and projects have taken different approaches to the presence of the child at their own FGC. Lisa Merkel-Holguin (Ashley & Nixon eds., 2007) describes how early writing and policies in the United States typically suggested that a child under the age of 12 was likely to be excluded from their own FGC. In the nations of the UK, different projects have taken different approaches, and it is common for children of eight or even younger to be present for some or all of their FGC.

The *Family Group Conference toolkit* (Ashley, et al., 2006) examines in some depth the issue of who has the right to agree to an FGC going ahead and who can legally and practically block the FGC or any subsequent plan. There is debate, however, as to whether the law is satisfactory, in particular in relation to the balance of rights and responsibilities between adults with parental responsibility and young people.

The continual evolution of the FGC model adds complexity to what initially appears to be a straightforward question. Where there's been domestic violence in the family, an important element of the FGC is that it can consider the needs of the wider family network, including adult victims of violence, as well as the safety of the child. Sean Haresnape (Ashley & Nixon eds., 2007), in his chapter on youth offending, considers whether the offender for whom the FGC has been organised may be a child with welfare needs, but emphasises that the process also needs to be restorative for the victim, who may also be a child. The *Family Group Conference toolkit* touches on other considerations when

FGCs are organised for vulnerable adults, such as those experiencing severe mental health problems.

How can the independence of co-ordinators be assured?

A key practice issue for FGCs has been the introduction of independent co-ordinators. It is the co-ordinator's role to run the conferences and the need for independence is predicated on the idea that as an independent person they will not have an interest in influencing outcomes of the conference. This, in theory at least, will mean they are more likely to encourage each family to exercise more control over decision-making processes.

There is a question as to whether and how independence can be ensured. Can an employee of the agency or even a project funded by the agency be truly independent when they know their wages or their funding is determined by the agency? Can a local authority employee be entirely independent and will they be perceived as independent if ultimately line-managed (even if three steps removed) by senior managers responsible for setting department budgets, policies and so on? Equally, how can FGCs, and the ethos underlying FGCs, be mainstreamed within agencies unless the FGC service itself is an integral part of the organisation? For example, virtually all local authorities that have introduced policies and procedures entitling family members to be offered a FGC have an in-house FGC service.

When is the right time to hold a family group conference?

Often the question is asked — with which families can we use the FGC approach? But this is the wrong question to ask because both practice and research suggest that this approach can be used with all families in a wide range of contexts. Thus, the question we should ask is *when* or under what *circumstances* should we use FGCs?

These circumstances are when there is a clear need for a decision to be made about the needs or welfare of a child and when the problem to be resolved is perceived as sufficiently serious by the family or by professionals that it warrants them participating in the FGC. Some families however, feel they were offered an FGC far too late, “*as a last ditch attempt*” when all else had failed, and when problems had become too entrenched.

Usually there needs to be some level of conflict within the family or between the family and the agency for a FGC to take place — otherwise practitioners, parents and children would simply agree a way forward.

Is the family group conference model being watered down?

There are plenty of cases of the FGC ethos being diluted for the convenience of the professionals and agencies. For example, some agencies have used non-independent co-ordinators, reduced significantly the preparation phases of the conferences, or not provided for family choices about who comes, and when or where the FGC should be held. In other words, although still called an FGC by the agency, the process and the experience for the family has been just another professionals' meeting.

The FGC model is not static and there may well be a strong rationale and obvious benefits to innovating and creating local adaptations to the model. Nevertheless, any development, particularly if driven by professionals, needs to be continually scrutinised in terms of its application. Otherwise there is a danger that the ethos of the FGC will be colonised by an increasing number of professional embellishments or requirements being introduced that water down or change the original ethos. We need to ask ourselves honestly, do these alterations to the model add to or take away from family control over the FGC process and what do families say about them?

Is accreditation of family group conference co-ordinators' training desirable?

In developing the FGC co-ordinator role there are tensions between standards and flexibility. The key skills of co-ordinating — respect, facilitation, negotiation, organisation — are not exclusive to one group or profession, and co-ordinators in England and Wales come from a range of backgrounds (Nixon, 1998). There are no nationally accepted standards, training or qualifications for co-ordinators. Some projects, particularly in Sweden, have determined that there should be no full-time co-ordinators in order to prevent an institutionalised and expert culture developing around the co-ordinator role (Lilja, 1998).

Yet there are variations in quality, both in terms of FGC co-ordinator skills and the standards to which projects and agencies operate. When agencies water down the FGC model, when professionals circumvent the process, when co-ordinators fail to adequately prepare, it is the children and their families who are let down.

Developing accredited training or quality systems is by no means a guarantee of improvements or consistent practice standards. The risk in developing an accreditation training standard for co-ordinators is that it could become a cultural and financial barrier that deters potentially suitable people within the community from becoming co-ordinators. Similarly, a quality standard may become a bureaucratic, professionally driven tool that constrains the flexibility of the FGC project to be shaped by families.

The counter-argument is that accredited standards have the potential, if well constructed, to provide a benchmark that can be used by professionals introducing FGCs into policy and procedures, by senior managers commissioning FGC services, project managers running services, inspectors monitoring service standards and delivery, and, most importantly, by children and families using the service. As with any role, FGC co-ordinators should be respected and supported to develop their skills and knowledge. Moreover, it has become clear that whether or not FGC projects collectively develop an accreditation system, some larger FGC services will do so regardless.

Mindful of the arguments, Family Rights Group has been working with members of the FGC Network and the University of Chester to develop a post-graduate award for new and existing co-ordinators. The award is being piloted for 18 months and an independent evaluation and business assessment of the pilot should help to inform the debate on the desirability of and practical impact of accreditation.

As FGC services expand, and local and national government listen to arguments, this debate is likely to run and run.

Conclusion

We have seen during the last 15 years the increasing use of the FGC model in professional child welfare practice, starting in New Zealand and spreading internationally including in the countries of the UK. Our knowledge from practice and research and our understanding of this process is growing. Experience and research evidence shows us

that FGCs are an effective and positive way of putting families at the centre of decision making.

The fact that we are asking these questions is confirmation that FGCs are not just a passing fad or innovation, but are becoming an integral part of child welfare services and are raising the benchmark for effective and respectful partnerships between children and families and professionals.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Review of the Child Care Proceedings System in England and Wales* (2006) Department of Constitutional Affairs and Department for Education and Skills and Welsh Assembly Government
- ² *Children Act Guidance (Volume 1)* (2008), Department for Children, Schools and Families
- ³ *The Public Law Outline, Guide to Case Management in Public Law Proceedings* (2008), Ministry of Justice

Recommended further reading

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