

Family Group Conferencing



In Hennepin County, Minnesota

*"Uniting families, strengthening communities,
and keeping children safe"*

Expanding FGC Within Our Community

Family Group Conferencing

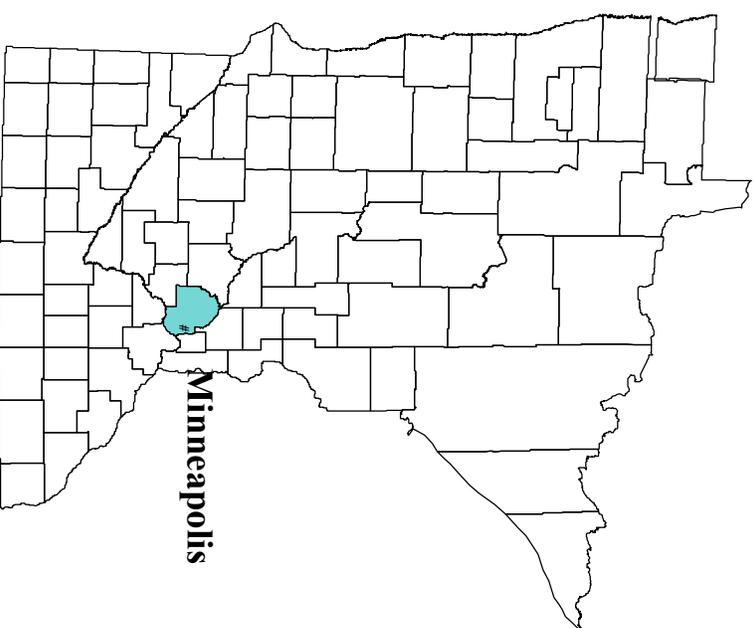
- Family Centered
- Strengths Based
- Culturally Relevant
- Community Based
- How does FCG Work?
 - Phase One: Information Sharing
 - Phase Two: Family Alone Time
 - Phase Three: Presentation of the Plan



Hennepin County Community

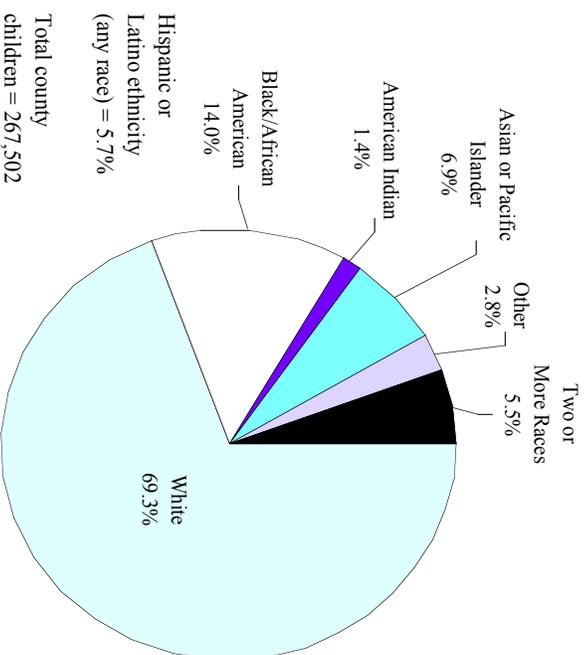
Population: Just over 1 million

- Large central city—Minneapolis
- Surrounding suburbs
- County-operated, state-administered child protection organization

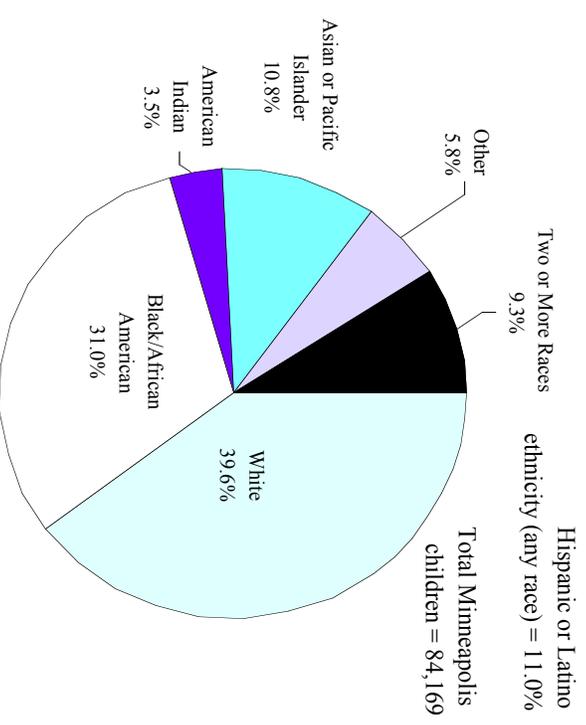


Racial Composition of Children Age 0 to 17; Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis, 2000

Hennepin County



Minneapolis



Designing a FGC Program

- **Visionary**
- **Stakeholders**
- **Steering Committees**
- **Agency-wide Training**
- **Implementation of the Pilot**

Recommendations

for the Pilot Project:

- Extend the use of FGC beyond Child Protection
- Extend FGC to include families that are not yet in the court or petition stage
- Inform families of the FGC option during the referral process
- Hire a supervisor to assist the FGC coordinators
- Encourage participation by community members and agencies
- Conduct an outcome evaluation to see the effects of FGC compared to the typical CP process
- Establish a steering committee that will draft plans, policies and procedures for FGC project operation

Evaluation Design

Process Indicators

- Number of families referred for a FGC
- Number of families completing a FGC
- Number of families completing a follow up FGC
- Number and average number of children participating in each FGC
- Number and average number of family members and service providers invited to each FGC
- Number and type of family members, and number and type of service providers (CP worker, guardianship worker, etc.) participating in each FGC
- Age range of children that are the subject of a FGC
- Race, ethnicity, and age of parent(s) participating in FGC compared to all CFASD CP cases and also to the parent(s) who were invited to participate in FGC
- Severity level of most current substantiated maltreatment--using Structured Decision Making (SDM) categories

Evaluation Design Continued

- Presiding issues of parent(s) (domestic abuse, child abuse, chemical abuse, etc.)
- Number of cases closed and closing reason/disposition:
 - Number of cases that have implemented their family plan at case closing
 - Number and percentage of children reunified with their families
 - Number and percentage of children who experience a Transfer of Legal Custody
 - Number and percentage of children who experience a termination of their parent's "parental rights"
- Number of cases at each stage:
 - Stage One: Conference scheduled
 - Stage Two: Conference completed
 - Stage Three: Plan presented

Evaluation Design Continued

- Number of service plans approved by the Court at initial presentation
- Summary of the most frequent reasons for service plan rejection and in what way service plans were modified
- Allocation of time spent by community facilitators on coordination/facilitation and on writing case plans
- Number and costs of the days in out-of-home placement (both the initial and any subsequent out-of-home placements)
- Number of continuous placements after the initial placement that led to the FGC or inclusion in comparison group
- Number of days between the most recent CP Case opening and the date of the Permanency Court Order
- Number of substantiated maltreatment reports following the initial substantiated abuse/neglect up to 18 months after the case is closed

Evaluation Design Continued

- Severity level--as measured by SDM (above) as compared to the initial substantiated abuse/neglect
- Content comparison of family/permanency plans
- Extent of completion of family/permanency plans at case closing

Engaging the Community

- Pilot to Program plus TLRs Grant
- Hennepin County Model
- Family driven, voluntary, culturally sensitive
- Customized to the family's culture
- Recruiting diverse facilitators among community agencies
- Expanding definition of community

TLRS Grantees

Leech Lake

- Itasca
- Cass
- Hubbard

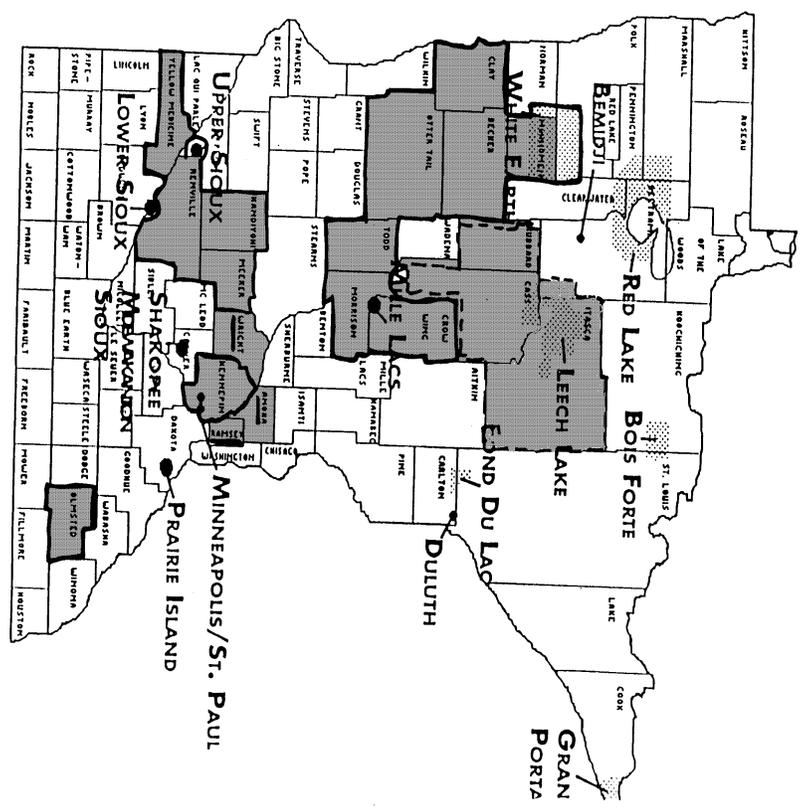
White Earth/Mille Lacs

- Becker
- Mahnomen
- Clay
- Otter Tail
- Todd
- Crow Wing
- Morrison

Upper Sioux

- Kandiynoni
- Meeker
- Renville
- Yellow Medicine

- Ramsey
- Wright
- Hennepin
- Olmsted
- Anoka

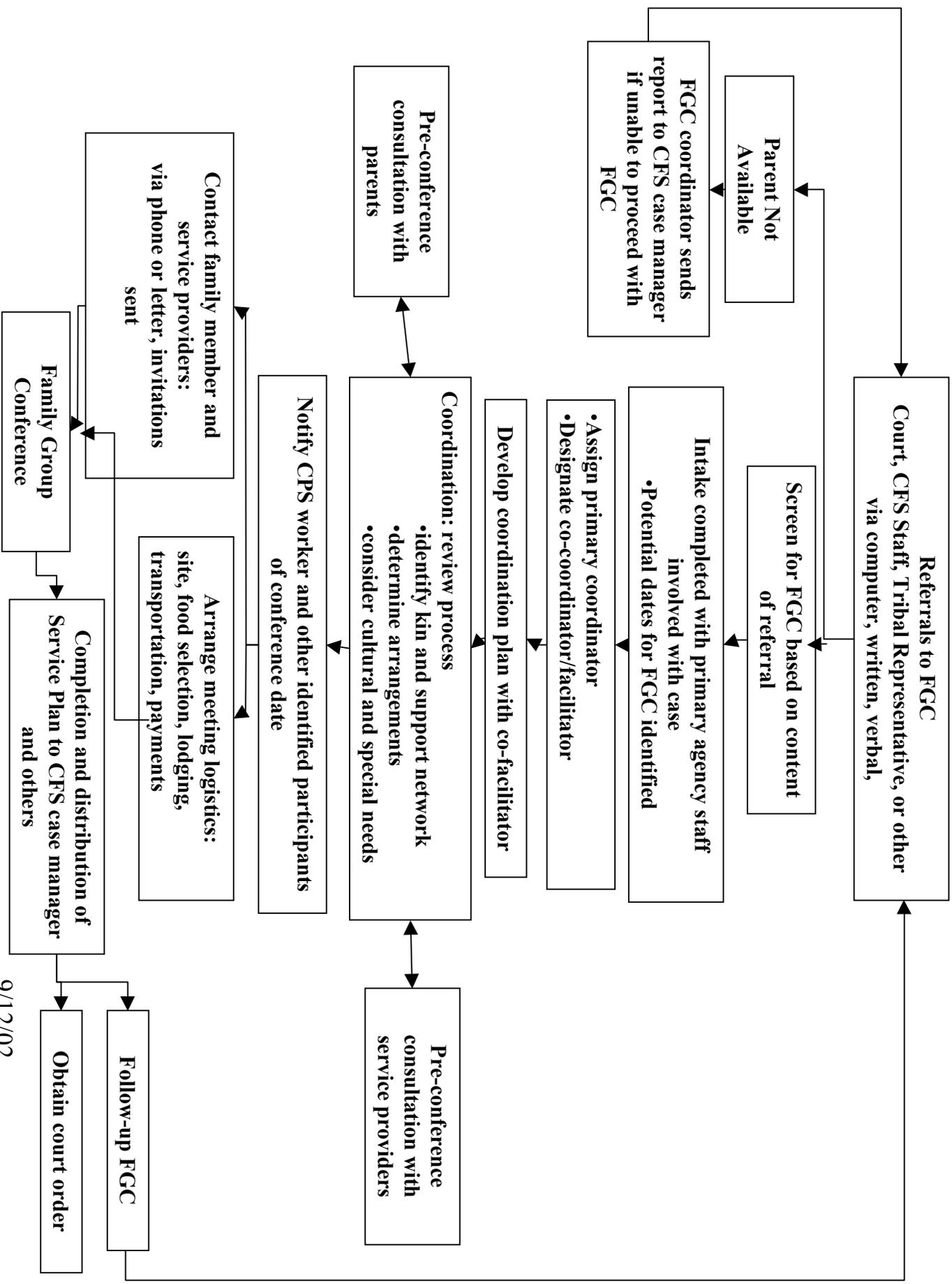


Hennepin County's Co-facilitation Model

- 7 county social workers
- 1 case management assistant
- 1 county supervisor
- 14 community agencies under contract to co-facilitate conferences

Criteria for Participation in HC's Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

- Parent is willing to participate and sign consent
 - Parent has a support network
 - Referral is made by conferring parties which could include a social worker, judge or a tribal representative or others



9/12/02

Identifying Components That Work

- Maintaining a voluntary, family driven model
- Flexible, adaptive, spontaneous coordination
- Cooperative co-facilitation with community
- Respecting family culture
- Ongoing outreach to community
- Ongoing training of staff
- Active recruitment of agency staff and community providers to maintain diversity of facilitators
- Ongoing support from administration
- Allocation of funds and resources
- Expanding definition of community
- Obtaining and utilizing evaluation results
- Acknowledging the power of the family

Client Descriptors

2001

**FGC Families vs. Traditional Child
Protection Families**

Race



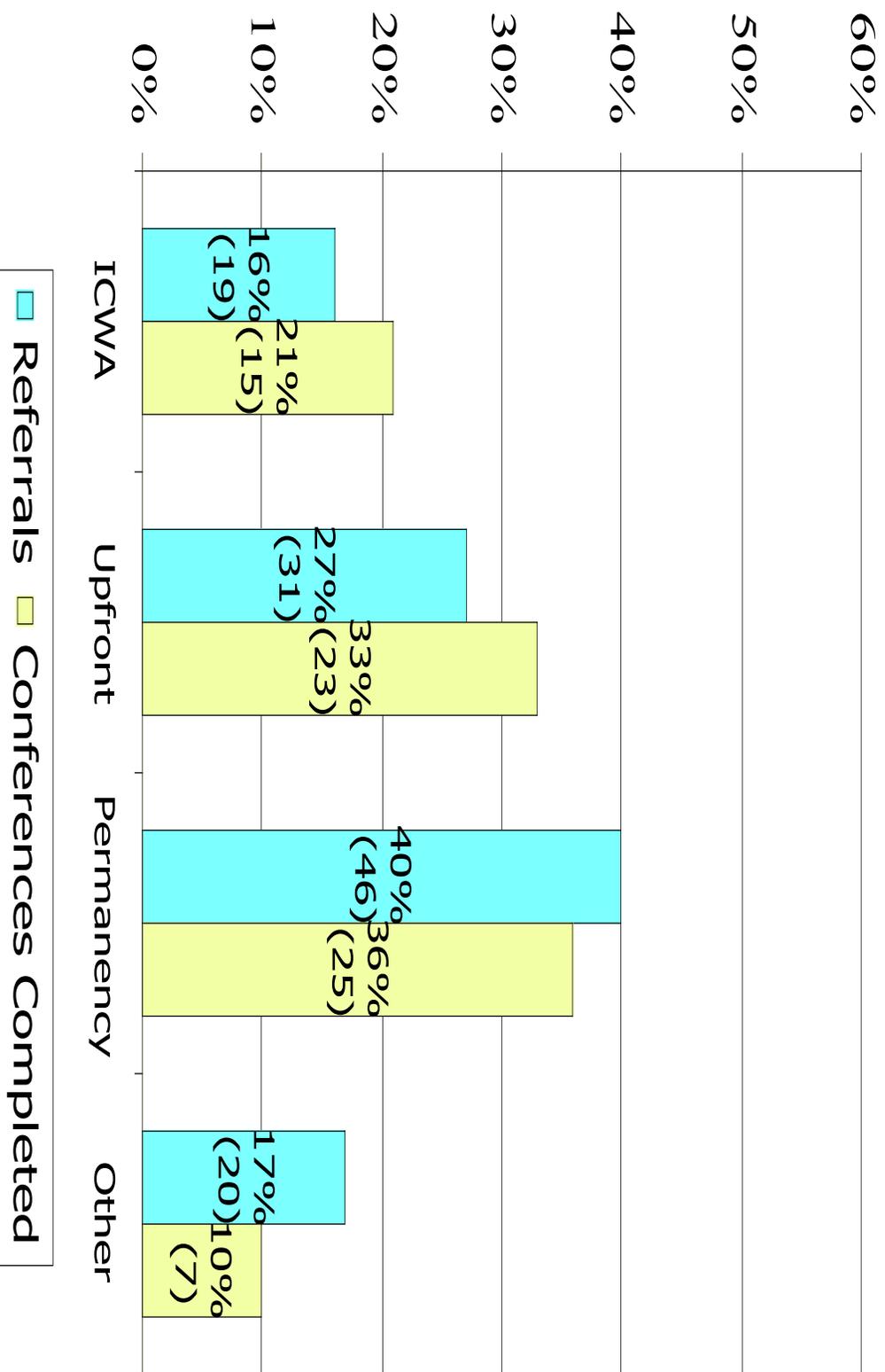
Race of children in out of home placement

Race of children served in FGC

African- American: 47.1%39%Asian/Pacific Islander: 2.7% 1%Caucasian:

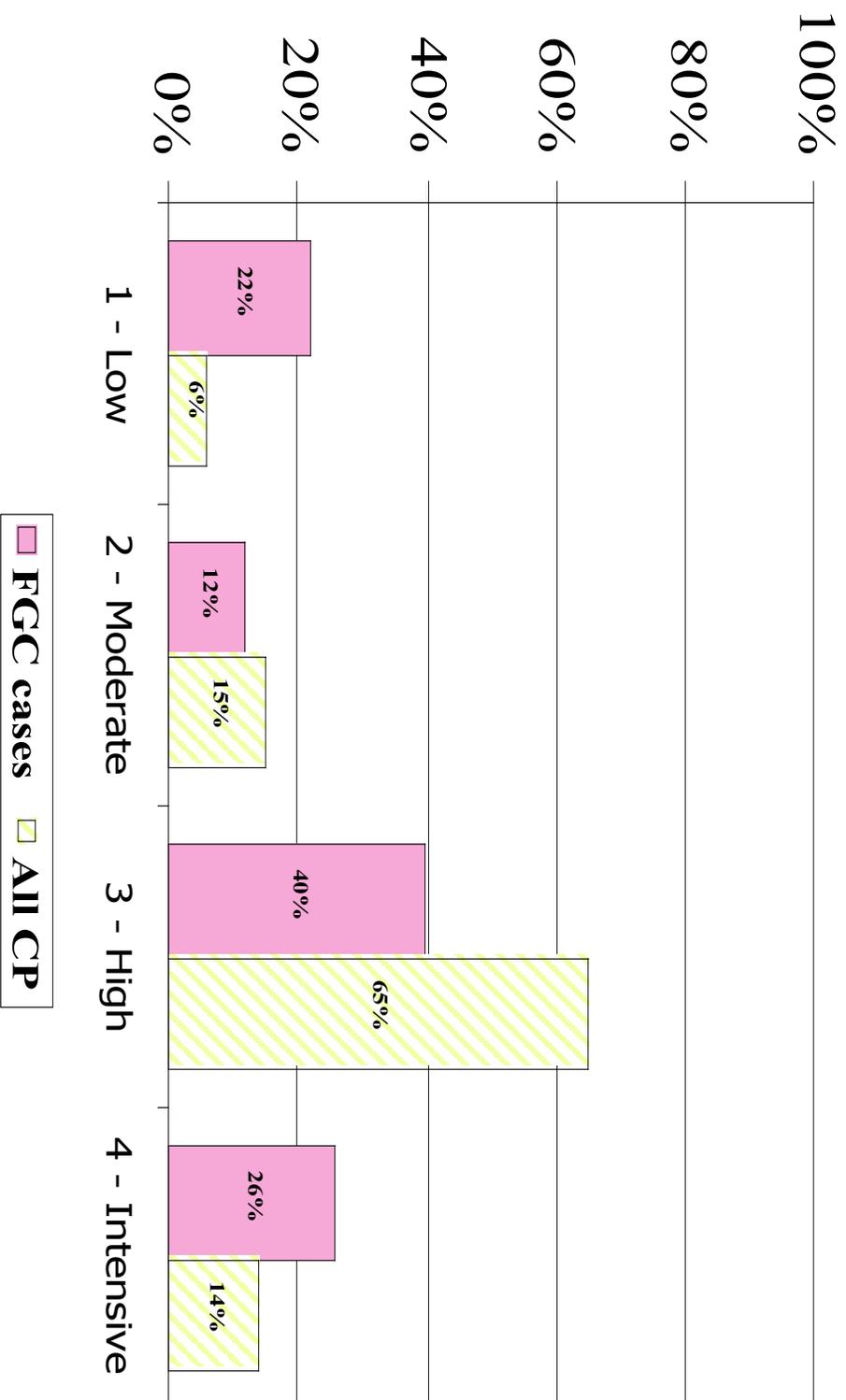
Families Referred to FGC by HC Program Area

Approximately 17% of ICWA cases opened were referred to FGC, 5% of UpFront cases, and 18% of CP Permanency cases

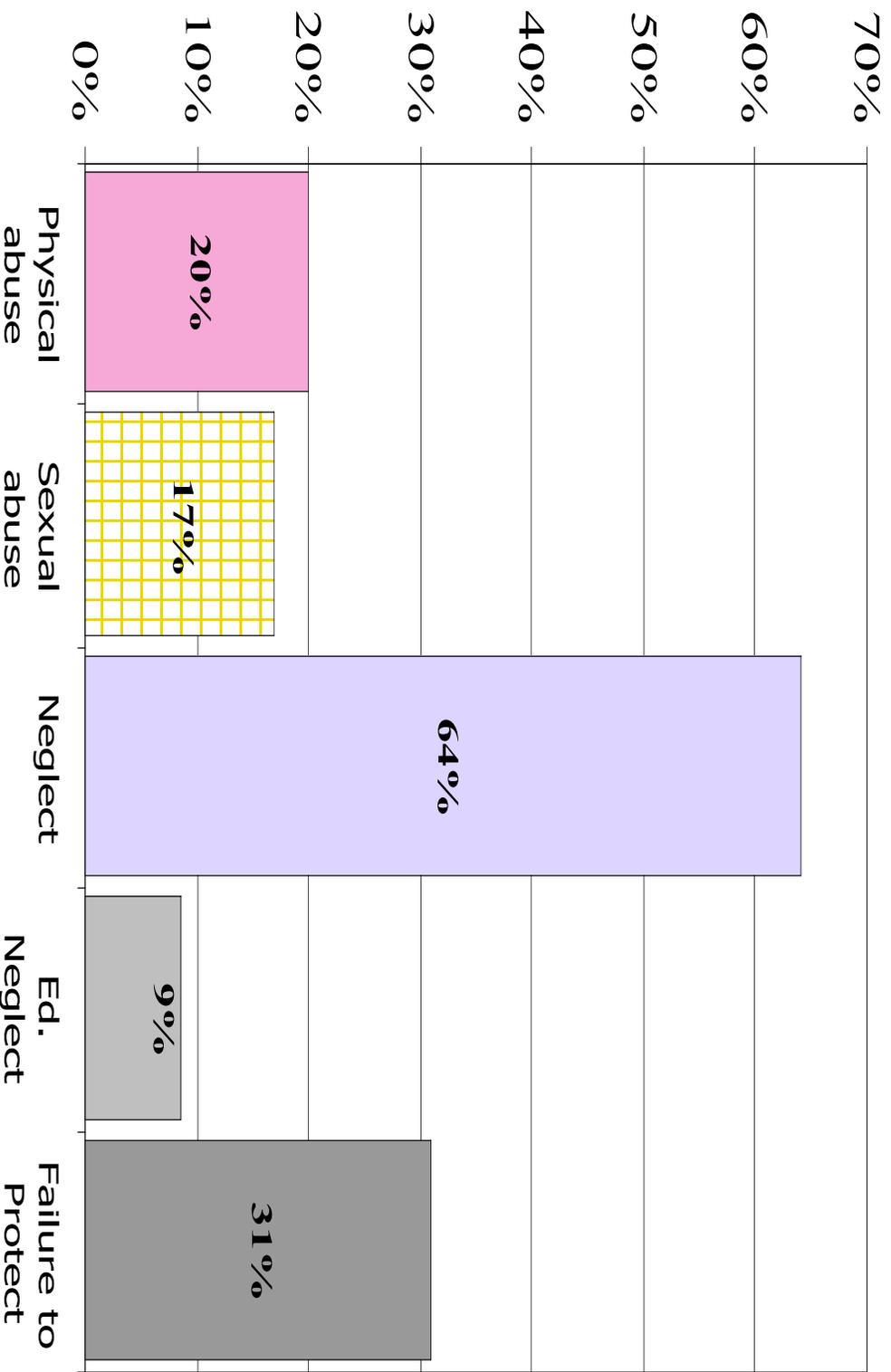


SDM Risk Levels

Cases using FGC vs. all CP cases opened in the Department



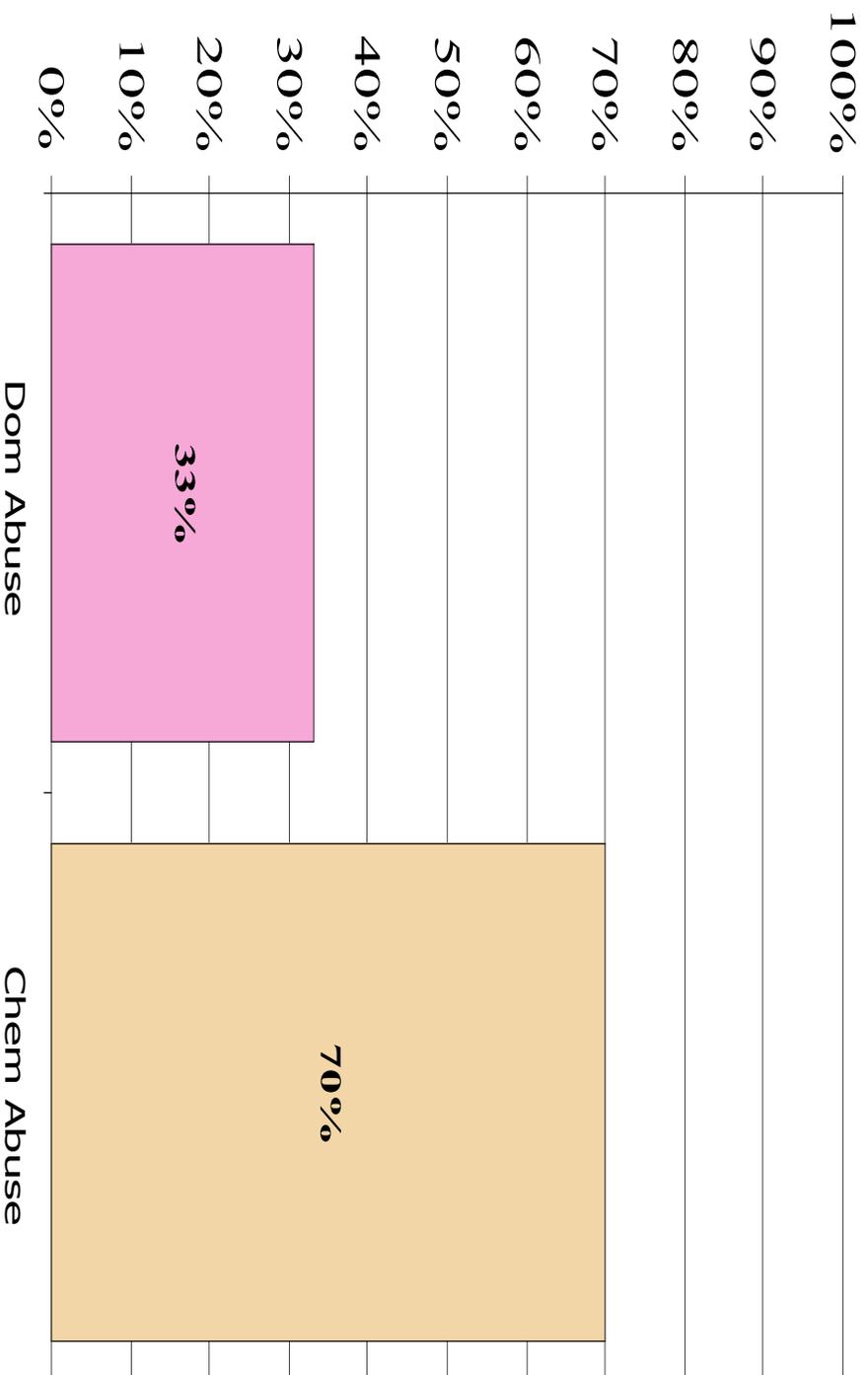
Family Child Protection Issues Identified



9/12/02

Other Family Issues Identified

As determined by the Child Protection case manager



Outcome Data

Families using FGC versus
families not using FGC

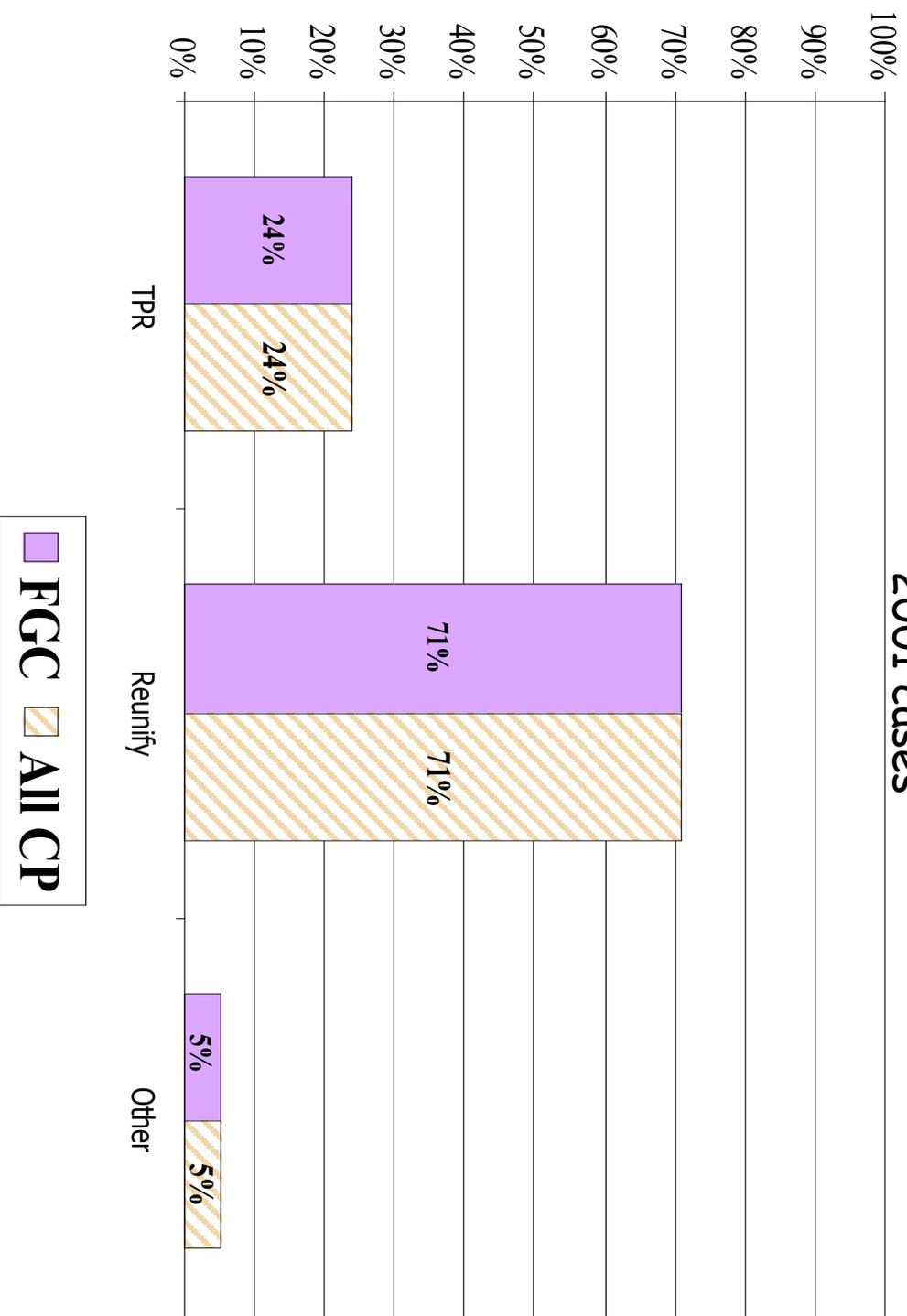
Program Details

- **215 conferences held since the inception of the program (2/05/00 - 6/30/02)---approx. 8 conferences per month**
- **11 families have had 1 or more follow up conferences**
- **Average number of children per family is 2 (range from 1-7)**
- **Average time spent by agency facilitators in 2002:**

Coordination	15.50 Hours
Facilitation	6.08 Hours
Writing case plans	6.66 Hours

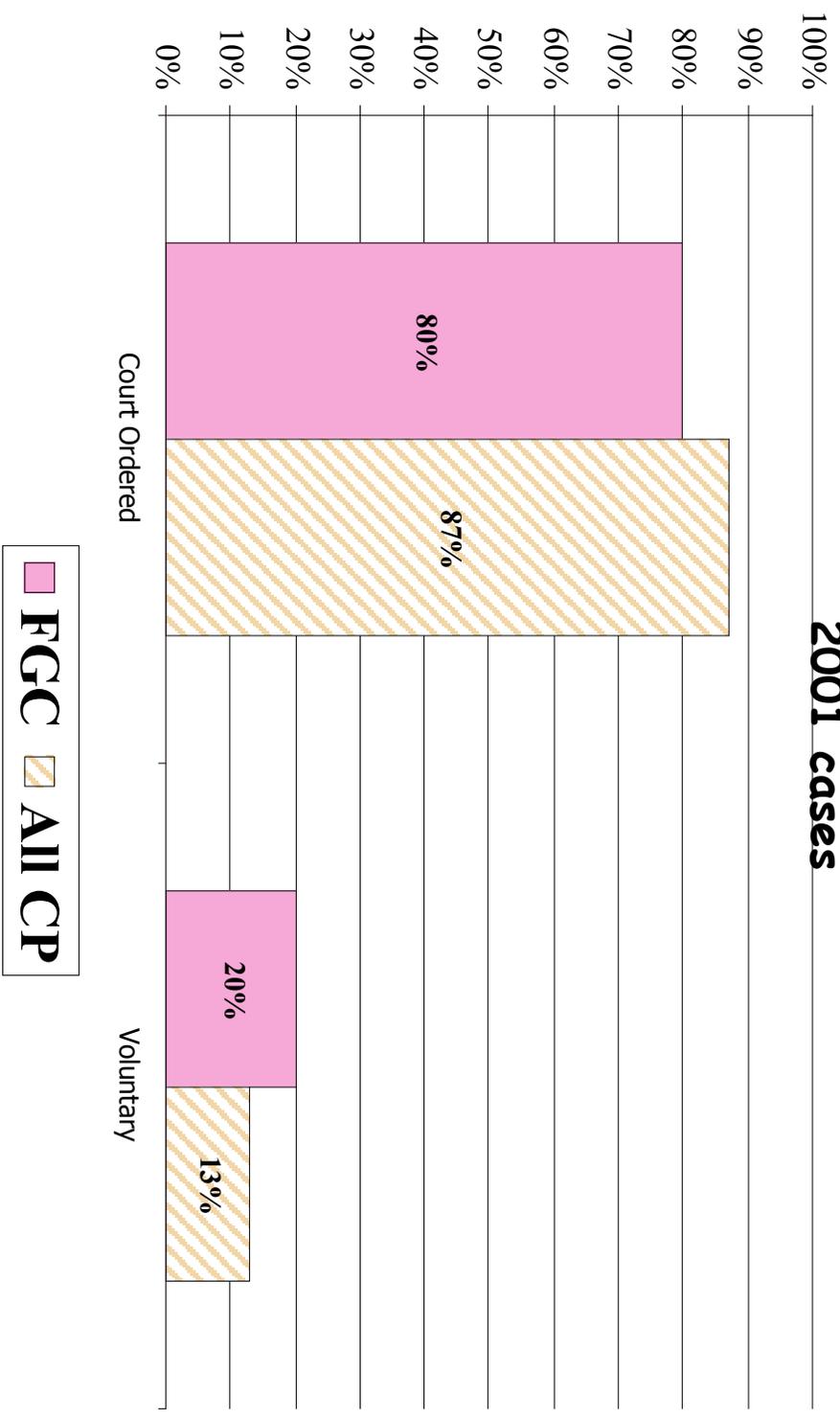
Closing Outcome of Cases

2001 cases



TPR Determination

2001 cases



Feedback from Families

Results of 40 Post-Conference Satisfaction Surveys

Families

- 48% said, overall, the Family Group Conference was a positive, productive experience for their family
- 82% said they had a good idea what the conference would be like beforehand and felt prepared for it
- 92% said they were satisfied with the service plan that was developed
- 98% said they were treated with respect during the conference

Service Providers

- 93% said the conference helped them better understand the family's situation and dynamics
- 96% said they would recommend Family Group Conferencing to their colleagues
- 97% said they were given adequate information beforehand about the purpose of the conference and their role

Feedback from Families

Results of 73 Follow-up Satisfaction phone surveys

(4-16 months after conference)

- Seventy-three percent of participants said the conference was somewhat to very helpful.
- **When asked, “In what ways was the conference helpful?”** They responded,
 - ☺ It brought the family physically together and emotionally closer.
 - ☺ Unexpected support was received.
 - ☺ It was a comfortable environment where participants were treated respectfully and listened to.
 - ☺ Families felt they had input in the plan for the children. Much valuable information was shared. There was a feeling of cooperation and agreement to the plan. Expectations were clear.
 - ☺ Better communication between family members.
- **Ninety percent** of family plans were totally or partially implemented. Family plans made for the children during the FGCS were followed through in more cases than not; however, very frequently the plan changed or a back up plan was implemented.

Feedback from Community Facilitators

What has worked well in the facilitation process?

- Shadowing
- Teaming with County staff
- Giving the “power” of decision making to families
- Coordination of meetings by community facilitators

What has not worked well?

- Time commitment of facilitating is an “add-on”
- We’re not always “in the loop” on all of the family’s issues

What do community facilitators add to the experience for families?

- Empower families
- Increase family comfort level

How can we ensure that a family’s culture is being represented during a conference?

- By continuing to have community facilitators at the conferences
- If we’re unsure if something is ok, we need to ask
- Ensure we’re not including community facilitators solely based on race for a “visual match” of culture.

Feedback from Social Workers

Benefits of Family Group Conferencing:

- Allows us to involve relatives who are interested in the children
- Helps the family make alternative plans if reunification isn't possible
- Empowers families in placement of the children
- Offers a family the opportunity to self-assess
- Helps a family understand what is going on, and, if reunification is not possible, to understand why
- More relatives are contacted through the FGC process than we knew about from the department's kinship search

Feedback from Social Workers Cont.

Barriers in Family Group Conferencing:

- Cases aren't being referred to FGC early enough
- Some parents are hesitant to participate because they don't want to signal to Court that they aren't interested in reunification
- Judges are ordering FGC unilaterally. FGC doesn't work for everybody.
- Information presented at FGC can be overwhelming and confusing to children that are present.
- Writing service plans can be intimidating for some families
- Social workers sometimes feel under-prepared for the conference and need more coaching on their presentation and role

Feedback from County Attorneys

(n = 13; results are from a study performed on 12/03/2001)

- Forty-six percent stated that they have worked with families who have participated in a FGC
- Eight-five percent stated that when working with families involved with the Children, Family, and Adult Services Department, they do consider referring them for a FGC
- When asked what differences they had seen in families who have participated in a FGC, their responses were:
 - Thirty-one percent feel that FGC case plans are written in a more complete manner as compared to traditional cases
 - Twenty-three percent feel that there is less court-time involved with the case
 - Twenty-three percent feel that there is more follow through on case plans
 - Fifty-four percent feel that the family is easier to work with
- Additional Concerns
 - Unrealistic plans may be developed and concerns about family making appropriate recommendations; need to create plans that are complete and realistic
 - A need to help families understand case planning verses court processes
 - A concern that the third phase of a conference is hurried which could result in incomplete plans, plans that are unrealistic, or plans that do not address problems
 - Concern about referrals being made for FGCs with families who do not have the resources-- “recycling”

Feedback from Public

Defenders/Dispo Advisors

(n = 11; results are from a study performed on 1/14/2002)

- Eighty-two percent stated that they have worked with families who have participated in a FGC
- Seventy-three percent stated that when working with families involved with the Children, Family, and Adult Services Department, they do consider referring them for a FGC
- When asked what differences they had seen in families who have participated in a FGC, their responses were:
 - Eighty-two percent feel that FGC case plans are written in a more complete manner as compared to traditional cases
 - Forty-five percent feel that there is less court-time involved with the case
 - Sixty-four percent feel that there is more follow through on case plans
 - Eighty-two percent feel that the family is easier to work with
- Additional Concerns
 - Social Workers need to initiate the FGC process more often; it's a really good program
 - More training is needed about the permanency options at the conference
 - Social Workers tend to act like they are tolerating the FGC process and not interacting with it

Expanding FGC in the

Future Through....

Family self referrals

Referrals to children returning to community from residential or correctional care

Applying use of FGC to Adult Protection situations

Future use of FGC in children who are emancipating

Addressing school attendance issues

Trained community agencies using FGC with client pre and post involvement with Hennepin County

Thank You!

Pamela Harris, African American Family Services

(612) 813-0782 E-mail: pamela@aafs.net

Kathleen Holland, Hennepin County

(612)348-6479 E-mail: kathleen.holland@co.hennepin.mn.us