

## Hampshire County, U.K.: A Place of Innovation for Family Group Conferencing

LAURA MIRSKY

Hampshire County, England, has been an important location for the development and use of family group conferencing (FGC), also known as family group decision making (FGDM). One of the largest nonmetropolitan counties in England, Hampshire has a population of 1.5 million and encompasses both urban and rural areas, with communities ranging from prosperous to economically depressed. There has been a wide variety of FGC activity in the county. Starting with child welfare, FGC has moved into youth justice, education and domestic violence applications, among others. This article explores a variety of FGC programs in Hampshire.

Steve Love, assistant director, Children and Families, Hampshire County Council, oversees FGC work in the county. Love said that he makes the decisions as to how FGCs are supported, awarding grants to NGOs (nongovernmental organizations). Five years ago, the county was doing more FGCs than all the other 150 regions in the U.K. combined, said Love, but now other areas are catching up. More than 600 FGCs per year are held in Hampshire. That is still a small percentage of the 6,000 cases where the FGC approach could potentially be utilized, he said. FGCs are not yet written into the law in the county. Love would like to see that happen but believes that it will take at least five years. He said he views FGCs as a means to an end. In Hampshire, he said, "We are not interested in FGCs just for the sake of doing FGCs, but to obtain as much family engagement as possible."

Child welfare policy in the U.K. was affected recently by a major child care inquiry surrounding the Victoria Climbié case, he said. (Victoria Climbié was a young African girl who came to the U.K. and was tortured and beaten to death.) There was extensive criticism of social services following this tragedy, "that we didn't use the powers available to protect a child," said Love. However, a new green paper (a government consultation document), entitled "Every Child Matters," seems to bode well for the future of FGC in the U.K., in that it includes family group conferencing as part of its Universal Parenting Services initiative, said Love. The green paper is "by and large very positive," he said. In any case, the Council will persist in its efforts to promote FGCs, said Love, adding, "FGCs are better able to engage the people involved and less expensive" than conventional statutory processes.

FGCs began in Hampshire when Paul Nixon, former commissioning officer for FGCs for the Hampshire County Council Social Services Department (now children's services manager, Children and Young People's Directorate, West Berkshire Council), began to identify problems with Hampshire's child welfare system. (In addition to a conversation with Nixon, this article references his paper, "Promoting Family Decision Making in Child Care Practice: An Overview of the Use of Family Group Conferences in Child Protection, Youth Justice, Schools and with Young Carers," 1999.)

FGC is a restorative process that empowers families to make decisions, normally made for them by public officials, concerning the care and support of their children and other family members. The practice began in New Zealand in youth justice and child welfare applications and has spread throughout the world. In New Zealand, FGC is built into law. The key features of the New Zealand FGC model are: Prior to the conference, a coordinator or facilitator does thorough preparation to engage and inform as many extended family members and friends as possible so that they will attend the conference. At the conference, professionals share information with the entire group about the case. Then, family and friends meet by themselves, without professionals present, to develop a plan concerning the case. Subsequently, professionals assess the family's plan for safety and legal concerns. Post-conference, professionals monitor and review the plan's progress and often one or more follow-up conferences are held. To learn more about FGC models and programs, consult the Restorative Practices eForum series of three articles, "Family Group Conferencing Worldwide," in the IIRP library at: [www.iirp.org/Pages/library.html](http://www.iirp.org/Pages/library.html).

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In 1992, Nixon found that Hampshire's child welfare system lacked family involvement in the decision-making process. He had heard about FGCs and wanted to do a few conferences, but his manager would not permit it until he obtained proper training and support and pulled together a multidisciplinary partnership, including people in the health, education and police professions. Nixon ultimately found that his manager had been right about the need to lay preliminary groundwork prior to holding conferences. "We made a steering group and set up a pilot," he said. They then wrote staff guidance and leaflets for families, established a training program and hired autonomous evaluators from the University of Sheffield, U.K., to research the process. Public meetings were held to recruit coordinators from the community who were independent of statutory agencies. Coordinators came forward from a variety of backgrounds, including a marriage guidance counselor, an artist and designer, a retired head teacher, a typist, a nurse, a community worker and a biologist.

Asked what makes a good coordinator, Nixon said that the best were not professionally trained, but had "natural talent and values." There is now a pool of 30 to 35 coordinators to draw from who attend regular training events and meet monthly for supervision, both as a group—to share what they've learned—and individually, with project managers. Hampshire is moving, however, toward posting full-time coordinators in various locations, to give them more credibility with "resistant statutory agency bureaucrats," said Nixon.

During Hampshire's first child welfare FGC pilot, 23 conferences were held, using the New Zealand FGC model. The results of the autonomous evaluations of the pilot were good, so the FGC program was introduced throughout the county. To read a research report on Hampshire child welfare FGCs, "Steering with the Current? Discovering the Family Perspective on FGC Outcomes, 2001," by Martin Stevens, Social Services Research and Information Unit, University of Portsmouth, go to: [www.hants.gov.uk/TC/sspm/steeringfgc.html](http://www.hants.gov.uk/TC/sspm/steeringfgc.html). The report focuses on the stories of eight families who experienced



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FGCs aimed at resolving child protection concerns.

The focus of youth justice FGCs is different from that of child welfare conferences, said Nixon, in that the former are a response to offenses committed by youths and directly involve victims. A key objective of youth justice FGCs is to make young people accountable for their actions in a context that also offers support and care. Interest in youth justice FGCs stemmed from concerns about the contemporary justice system—from court system delays and spiraling costs to a lack of meaningful involvement in the court process for victims, young offenders and their families. These problems produced inadequate accountability for young offenders and insufficient provision for reparation.

Hampshire's youth justice FGC pilot was conducted from 1997-1999. Its aims: to provide an alternative to criminal proceedings for young people referred, to enable families to develop and implement a plan to support young people and keep them in their community, to encourage young people and their families to take responsibility for decisions, to prevent reoffending, to ensure that victims' perspectives were fully heard and valued, to evaluate the process outcomes independently and to disseminate the findings. Referral criteria specified that FGCs would be used

outside the court system for repeat offenders, who, based on local police research, were deemed unlikely to respond to further cautioning (formal warning by police). Twenty cases were randomly allocated either to an FGC or to processing in the usual manner in court.

The pilot produced promising results. Independent research found considerable reductions in recidivism rates in the FGC group and collected approving comments from youth and their families. Most family members in the study (90 percent) were positive about the FGC process and felt that the young person had not been put under inappropriate pressure at the conference, which is one of the concerns about FGCs, said Nixon. Most people involved in FGCs (80 percent) felt the process had decreased the likelihood of the young person reoffending. As one young offender explained, FGCs hold young people accountable within their family in a way the court system never does: "With this [FGC] it does show you how it affects the people around you. I think it's better in that way because you don't want to hurt the people you love."

Overall, family members were more involved in FGCs than in court processes. However, said Nixon, there was greater difficulty getting families to attend youth justice FGCs than child welfare FGCs, even though the same coordinators were used. This might have been because of feelings of shame about the young people's offenses, he said, or because families were not interested in the gathering or the food and just wanted to "get on with the job." (Food-sharing time for family groups and professionals is usually part of an FGC.) At youth justice FGCs, participants "didn't feel like eating," said Nixon. However, he said, it was easier getting professionals to attend youth justice FGCs than child welfare FGCs.

The youth justice FGC project was committed to including victims' perspectives in the decision-making process. Most victims were very positive about their inclusion, and their feedback about the process and the outcome was favorable. Seeing young people and their families in a different context often significantly changes the way a victim looks at an offender, said Nixon. FGCs transform the

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offender from an unseen and often feared individual to a young person seen in the context of his family, making him far more human. FGCs give offenders an opportunity to apologize for their actions firsthand to their victims, often leading to forgiveness



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and healing. As one victim commented, “He said sorry to me in the meeting. I could forgive him after that.” Nixon recollected the first youth justice FGC, which was about stealing a car. After the conference, he said, the victim drove the offender home in the car he’d stolen.

Victims are generally not included in private family time, when the family is left alone to discuss matters and make a plan, although “there are no hard and fast rules about this,” said Nixon. The thought behind holding private family time without victims, he said, is that the conference is about the young person, and that, left alone, the family will discuss concerns that they won’t discuss with non-family present. Victims don’t object to private family time, he said, because they know about it in advance. The key thing for victims is “having their say in the beginning,” said Nixon.

Another important aim of youth justice FGCs—reparation—was common in conferences but not in court. Again, this is likely a product of the face-to-face nature of the work between victims and families and the role families can take in helping the young person provide appropriate reparation to the victim. Agreed-upon actions in the pilot

included paying back sums of money for damage done or items stolen, community service, or working directly or indirectly for the victim.

FGCs bring families together in unexpected ways, said Nixon. He recalled a conference in which a boy had smashed up a community cricket center. The family’s plan involved the youth and his father repairing the center together. The boy hadn’t seen his father in some time, and this plan helped them rebuild their relationship in a way no one had anticipated.

Ros Cassy, chief executive of the Hampton Trust, the NGO monitoring youth justice FGCs in Hampshire, is concerned about the present and future of the practice in the county. The Trust was commissioned to start youth justice FGCs in 1997. Initially, FGCs were done in the preventive phase—the first time a youth was cautioned. More recently, FGCs have been done as part of a court order. “It’s more difficult that way,” said Cassy. The plan developed in the FGC informs the sentence. “This has proved very complex,” she said.

“We had a different system before [Prime Minister] Blair,” said Cassy. Now, she said, “We’re in a punitive phase in the U.K. where youth justice is concerned.” The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act was a mixed blessing for FGCs, said Cassy. It was “good news in some ways,” because it mentioned FGCs. Also, local authorities were charged to work together and victims were addressed. Multi-agency Youth Offender Teams (YOTs) were established, made up of police and probation officers, plus social services, health authority and education employees. There are 154 YOTs in the U.K.

The establishment of YOTs was a critical change, said Cassy, in that it mandated that multiple local authorities have a say in managing every offending youth. Youth justice FGC referrals and funding now come from the YOTs. “We used to have fortnightly meetings with the police youth justice workers,” she said, “but that’s gone now, replaced by the YOTs, a more accountable system, much harsher, more punitive and ambivalent about restorative justice.” Far more children are being sent to prison now, she said, especially

since the age of criminal responsibility (when a child can be prosecuted for a crime), has been lowered from 14 to 10. “An awful lot of what we do in this area seems to follow the United States,” added Cassy. Another problem is the powerful British tabloid press, with their “hang ‘em and flog ‘em attitude toward ‘evil’ young people,” which is “catching or leading the public mood,” she said.

The Hampton Trust is a voluntary, non-statutory body. Since FGCs are not statutory, this “is a huge pressure for us,” said Cassy, “unlike in New Zealand.” Essex County, U.K., has been more successful with youth justice FGCs, in that they have a cross-agency partnership of senior managers from social services, YOTs and the police dedicated to requiring people to use them, said Cassy, adding, “We would love to have a situation like that, where people must choose to opt



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out, not in” to the FGC process, and justify why they’re opting out. “Children have a right to this process,” she said, adding, “You won’t change behavior by sending kids to prison, but if you can help families address matters you will get a long-term result.”

To read a case study of a Hampshire youth justice FGC, go to: [www.hamptontrust.org.uk/fgccasestudy.html](http://www.hamptontrust.org.uk/fgccasestudy.html). The case involved a 12-year-old boy who assaulted an ailing neighbor. The harm the

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boy caused was repaired with help from an FGC.

The Hampshire Family Group Conference Project in Education was established in 1998 to address the needs of young people who were experiencing serious problems in the education system. Hampshire is one of the largest counties in the U.K., with 540 schools. The county has "an external image of leafy affluence, but pockets of extreme deprivation," including an Educational Action Zone of high-priority need, said Liz Holton, project manager, Family Group Conferencing, Hampshire County Education Department. The FGC model is as valuable with well-off families as it is with those that are more deprived, she said. Holton called the project "an education-funded and -based project using the New Zealand model to promote home-school partnerships."

Children were referred to the project by staff within the education system. Referral could be for any problem relating to school, including behavioral difficulties, truancy, school phobia, bullying or being bullied and risk of temporary or permanent exclusion (also known as expulsion). Slightly less than half of the referrals were for truancy, slightly less than half for behavior problems, and the rest "a bit of both," said Holton. Referral required a school's full agreement, indicated by a head teacher signing a referral form, thereby showing a willingness to negotiate over the family's plan and to participate in project evaluation.

In an evaluation of the first year of the pilot, in May of 1999, Gill Crow, University of Sheffield, who has written and researched extensively about family group conferencing in the U.K., wrote that immediate outcomes of the conferences had been positive. Teachers were found to work well with the model, and coordinators were able to transfer skills they had learned in other types of FGCs and did not require additional training. The program, now no longer in the pilot stage, has been in progress for five years and is open to all Hampshire schools.

Holton did not note any significant difference between the child welfare and the education FGC models. Independent coordinators—the same ones who do child welfare and

youth justice conferences—are used: a mix of social workers and those with other types of mediation and counseling backgrounds. The only difference in the models is in how to fit the conferences into the school day. Whether the FGC is held during the school day or after, both have implications for teachers. Still, teachers have responded positively to the process and welcomed the opportunity to involve the wider family group in the child's difficulties at school. The project has helped with ongoing communication between schools and families, said Holton, and added that Crow's research has indicated sustained improvement for six months to a year following an FGC.



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One of the outstanding things about FGCs is the way they can effect small changes that have enormous impact, said Holton. She recounted the story of a 10-year-old boy on the verge of expulsion from school whose behavior problems took up five hours a week of his teacher's time. The boy's stepfather was terminally ill. An FGC was held, attended by the boy's mother, his biological father, the father's new partner, siblings, aunts, uncles, "the school dinner lady and even the postman," said Holton. During the FGC, it was

discovered that the boy, in addition to the rational fear of losing his dying father, had an irrational fear of losing his mother. The family came up with a plan for the boy to call his mother every day from the school office to allay his fears. The daily phone call had "a magical effect," said Holton. More support from family members was also offered at the conference, as well as professional intervention, but it was the daily phone calls that turned the tide for the boy, who was able to cope when his father died.

Although a child may exhibit problems in school, it's always the tip of the iceberg, said Holton. The child may be unwanted; there may be drug or alcohol issues at home. In school FGCs, parents bring their agendas to the meetings, just as they do in child welfare FGCs. And if one child is referred for a conference, there may be similar issues for his or her siblings. If a coordinator discovers this in conference preparations, the siblings' issues will be addressed in the conference, too.

FGCs in education are becoming increasingly widespread in Hampshire. Holton hopes that they will eventually be used for children with special needs and disabilities, and that the child welfare, youth justice, domestic violence and education FGC projects will all be connected. She thinks it would make more sense to have a county FGC project instead of different projects, as there is a huge amount of overlap between them. She'd also like to see families make their own referrals.

Another important area for FGCs in Hampshire is in domestic violence cases. Although there has been apprehension about and resistance to FGC use in these situations, Hampshire's program has been quite successful. Domestic violence FGCs in Hampshire are conducted in the towns of Basingstoke and Deane under the auspices of the Day-break FGC Dove Project. Sharon Inglis was formerly manager of the project. (She is now coordinating a multiagency FGC project for the Children and Young People's Directorate at West Berkshire County Council, U.K.)

Domestic violence FGCs had their origins in Hampshire in 1998, when Paul Nixon was commissioning officer for FGC. Nixon and Chief Inspector Paul Bright, of the

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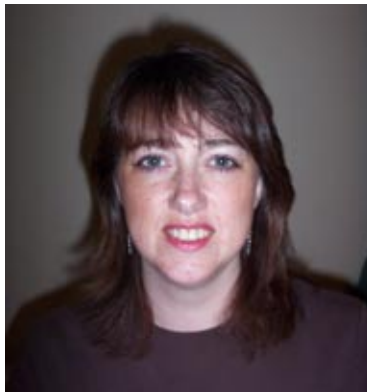
Hampshire Constabulary Criminal Justice Department, were inspired by the work of the Family Group Decision Making Project of Newfoundland, Labrador and New Brunswick, co-directed by Joan Pennell and Gale Burford, which used an adaptation of New Zealand FGC to reduce domestic violence. It was clear from that project's outcomes that FGC had been very successful with domestic violence in Canada, said Inglis.

Chief Inspector Bright conducted research into domestic violence and the use of FGCs in 2001-2002, comparing systems for dealing with domestic violence issues in the U.S. with those in the U.K., under the auspices of the Fulbright Scholarship for research into police issues. Bright found that domestic violence offenders are reluctant to change under the threat of punishment. His report concluded: "Placing men in prison separates couples and, if anything, can make the situation more volatile once the man is released." To read Bright's report, go to: [www.hampshire.police.uk/index.htm?Fulbright.htm](http://www.hampshire.police.uk/index.htm?Fulbright.htm).

Nixon asked for support for an FGC domestic violence project from the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council on the basis that violence affects the entire community, said Inglis. Domestic violence was a high priority for the borough council, so it came up with money for the Dove Project pilot. Over a period of about a year-and-a-half, a pilot steering group was set up, which included representatives from the borough council, police, probation, social services, women's refuges and various NGOs.

Inglis was appointed to run the two-year pilot in January 2001. Preliminary consulting work was done with the community, so as not to impose the program on them. Women's and victims' advocates were concerned about the safety aspects of putting victims and perpetrators together. Later on, after witnessing the success of FGCs, they became the project's biggest supporters, said Inglis.

The pilot's creators looked at the practice issue, asking how this project would differ from the usual FGC practice. One development was that all Dove Project coordinators took on an educative role in addition to a facilitative one. This takes skill, said Inglis.



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Dove Project coordinators are trained in domestic violence issues of power and control and their effect on relationship dynamics. They must be clear about what to look for, what's OK and what's not, and how to empower victims to leave abusive situations or stay in a way that keeps them safe.

The pilot's creators had to decide whether to allow perpetrators in conferences. A strong case was made that this would be dangerous. What won in the end, said Inglis, was a "common sense argument." Most of the female victims of domestic violence were living with these violent men, and it was felt that if the men didn't attend the conference they would sabotage any outcome. Victims said, "Of course we want them to come. What's the point of having a conference without them?" When most perpetrators were asked what their reaction would be if offered an FGC, they said they wouldn't come—they wouldn't want to hear themselves criticized. But, said Inglis, usually if they're invited, they come. The only time a perpetrator is not invited to an FGC is when a woman has decided to leave an abusive situation. Those FGCs are about creating extended family support and safety for women to disengage from their partners, said Inglis.

Dove Project referral criteria included the presence of children in the family, residence in Basingstoke and Deane and an assurance that the conference would be safe. Project planners wondered how violent and manipulative men might try to influence or control women in the conferences, and this became part of the assessment process. "We needed to be convinced that the perpetrator would be willing to address his behavior," said Inglis. "If he said, 'Yeah, I hit her, she deserved it,' then we had to face the woman and tell her an FGC was not going to happen." Inglis emphasized that victims were not assessed vis-à-vis their suitability for an FGC, only perpetrators. Asked if she's had cases where the woman is violent, Inglis said that a woman's violence is generally retaliation—a reaction to a man's violence—rather than about power and control, as is the case with a man's violence. Little research has been done about women's violence, she added.

Most Dove Project participants—both victims and perpetrators—come from violent families, said Inglis. There is a very high percentage of intergenerational violence, so victims are often adversely affected by well-meaning but very bad advice. For example, said Inglis, "We don't want Granny saying: 'I put up with it and we're fine now.'" Accordingly, care must be taken in preparation. Family members are asked to talk about their views on domestic violence. Coordinators make it clear that violence is not acceptable and everyone who attends the FGC must be of the same mind.

Ensuring that the conference is safe is a major priority. Said Inglis, "At first we all thought that the perpetrators would blow their tops and storm out," but this did not happen. Other family members might present dangers, she said, citing cases of victims' brothers who want to "have a go at" perpetrators. But, she said, as with any FGC, preparation helps with these types of problems. Family members inform coordinators beforehand who is likely to explode so that trouble can be preempted. Inglis said that she had never seen any violence occur during a domestic violence-related FGC.

Pre-conference safety measures include spending time with the victim to learn the

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perpetrator's characteristic manipulative behaviors, such as finger-tapping or certain kinds of looks. The coordinator builds strong relationships with both victims and perpetrators before the conference, treating both with respect. Said Inglis: "We may not like the fact that perpetrators are violent, but we treat them as vulnerable people and encourage their supporters to attend, along with the victims' supporters."

The police always know where and when a domestic violence FGC is being held, although it is preferable not to have a big police presence at the conference, said Inglis. The coordinator always has the police department on telephone speed-dial, but in two years, no coordinator has ever had to call the police during a domestic violence FGC. Police are also informed as to where participants will be after the conference, and are instructed to monitor the address for 36 hours. Police have never had to intervene post-conference.

In most cases, children attend FGCs with their parents. Some people were concerned that involving children in domestic violence FGCs might be abusive. But, said Inglis, the children said, "Listen, this is happening in my house," and were glad for the chance to bring the facts into the open. A large proportion of families where domestic violence is a problem have many children. The first Dove Project FGC involved a family of eight children, ages three through 19. All the children wanted to have their say and tell their mother and father, "This is how it feels when you fight." Older and younger children paired off and wrote things together. At the conference, older children read younger children's words and everyone passed a talking stick. "It was immensely powerful," said Inglis, adding: "That's the emotional stuff that changes people's behavior."

At this family's review conference several months later, said Inglis, the 10-year-old son, a "street-wise character," told a story, tears in his eyes: "Last week we had a huge family row. People were hitting each other. I stood on the table and held up the plan [which the family had drawn up at the first conference] and said, 'We need to do this!' They told me, 'He's right. Let's stop. Let's meet 'round the table and talk.'" The boy was describing a whole

family learning how to behave together and heal, said Inglis, adding, "If we give children the feeling they have a place in the family, it has huge implications."

As to conference outcomes, Inglis said, "I consider a conference a success if everybody feels safe and heard—I don't care what the plan is." Still, there has never been a Dove Project conference where the family didn't devise some kind of plan. Moreover, Child Protective Services requires a safety plan if a child is on the protection register. Inglis noted that five children had been removed from the register post-FGC and considered that a huge success. Added Inglis, if a conference plan determines that a woman needs services, they're easy to come by, because all the domestic violence services are involved via the project steering group.

Inglis hopes that domestic violence FGCs will begin all around the county and in other counties, as well. As an aside, Inglis said she thinks that domestic violence is much more dangerous in the United States than it is in the United Kingdom. "We don't have guns," she explained. Inglis believes that there are more domestic violence-related deaths in the U.S. than there are in the U.K. because of the abundance of guns in the U.S. She said she thought it would be essential to establish weapon and gun rules for domestic violence FGCs in the U.S.

The overseer of the Dove Project, Daybreak FGC, an NGO founded in 1999, has been involved in many other FGC projects throughout Hampshire. A major priority for Daybreak is to expand community involvement, especially that of children, in their programs. Marilyn Taylor, director of Daybreak, and Melissa Hansen, manager of Daybreak's Portsmouth Community Partnership FGC Project, addressed the issue of community involvement in their presentation at the IIRP's fourth international conference in Veldhoven, Netherlands, in August 2003. Taylor believes that the Dove Project's lengthy period of consultation with the local community, particularly women's groups, was essential to its success.

In Taylor and Hansen's vision of community involvement: children of all ages are allowed to attend their own FGC; families are

able to directly refer themselves for an FGC; children are able to directly refer themselves and their families for an FGC; families and communities may decide the criteria for access to an FGC program; and children and young people are part of the hiring process for FGC program staff. They realize that these notions are controversial. Hansen cited being hired in her current manager position as an example of the type of community involvement she and Taylor endorse; a young person who had participated in an FGC was on the interview panel that chose



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her. Hansen termed this: "progressive and wonderful."

Said Taylor, "FGCs as a whole empower children and families, and the community involvement process takes that empowerment another step forward. It's they who tell us right from the beginning how to shape and how to evaluate the program, telling us what questions we should be asking. We feel very passionately that any organization that delivers family group conferencing ought to have an organization culture that is in line with the values of family group conferencing. It should be about participation and democratic processes."

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Taylor discussed the difference between community-led FGCs and those led by the state. Most of the FGC programs in England and elsewhere across the world, she said, are set up by child welfare or youth justice agencies. Because they provide the money, they decide what the programs are like. In child welfare situations, she said, agencies decide when FGCs will be held, for example, when they perceive that a child is at risk, when a child protection situation has come into court, when a child might be taken into state care or when a child is making a transition from care back into the community. These are all highly appropriate situations for an FGC, said Taylor. "But in a community-led FGC process," she said, "We don't come in and dictate the terms under which FGCs are held."

Instead, there's an initial period of consultation with key people in the community, plus workshops in youth centers and schools, during which basic concepts of FGC are explained. People are then asked to talk about issues in their community and about how FGCs, often a scarce resource, should be used. "We take referrals directly from families, and find that the nature of the problems that they want to address are different from referrals from the social services department," said Taylor.

Asked what kinds of issues families want to see addressed, Taylor mentioned one example: parental access to children. She cited a situation in which a family with a small boy had been split up. The mother had a history of drug and alcohol abuse, so the father and his new wife were caring for the boy. Two years later, the mother had achieved sobriety and wanted more contact with her child. For the father and step-mother, how and if the boy's biological mother should come back into his life was a real issue. There was fear about her drug and alcohol abuse. "The child was not being neglected, so there was no way that the department of social services would have taken this on. But the family really wanted the conference, and there were a number of similar situations," said Taylor.

New government-funded programs have begun in England in the last five years with objectives very much in line with Daybreak's philosophy: to involve children, families and

communities in the delivery of local services, said Taylor. The Sure Start programs are aimed at children under four, Children's Fund programs at children under 13, and Connexions programs at children over 13. Daybreak has had successful partnerships with these programs and is planning more. Its partnership with Sure Start in Somerstown, Portsmouth, has taken referrals directly from families in a minority community, with poor housing and high unemployment, and has worked really well, said Taylor. Other Sure Start and Children's Fund programs in other deprived communities across Portsmouth were impressed by what Daybreak was doing. So Daybreak's Portsmouth Community Partnership Family Group Conferencing



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Program was formed, involving several Sure Start and Children's Fund programs, and the Portsmouth Social Services and Education departments.

As manager of this program, Hansen is dealing with a number of entities coming together. How, she asked, do you make sure that everyone gets a fair shake, that some entities don't dominate the project, and how do you make it truly reflective of the community? This will be a challenge, as these diverse agen-

cies may have different agendas, said Taylor, "but they are all committed to a community-led program and to working with Daybreak to achieve this. With this program we will make sure that young people will be involved with everything we do."

Across the political spectrum in England, "There's an idea that we should be diverting funds to enable citizen participation in services that are provided for them," said Taylor. Sure Start and Children's Fund programs are part of this initiative. "It's such a high priority of the government now to involve communities in programs that if you don't do it, you won't get funded the next time around," she said. The financial support that Daybreak recently obtained from the Children's Fund will enable, indeed compel them, to make connections with schools and youth groups. "The first thing we're going to do is have a community consultation with young people, using focus groups, to say to them: this is what this program is in the town, this is what it looks like. How do you think young people like yourselves might be enabled to have access to it?"

Taylor said she didn't know what the outcome of this consultation would be, adding, "When we started the Dove Project, people said, 'What do you mean, you're going to put the perpetrator and the victim in the same room together? You're mad!' And we spent two years working with the community around that. And in a way it feels like we're in the same position now. People are saying, 'What do you mean you'll take referrals directly from children?' So we are exploring it with the children, with the people in the community, to try and sort out our policy. We haven't got the answers. Maybe by next year we'll be able to tell you a bit more."

The Restorative Practices eForum will continue to report on FGDM and FGC programs in the future. ☺