HSC Health and Social Care

Empowering Families

Strength Support Empowerment Decisions Protection Network

Regional Guidance on the Provision of Family Group Conferences in HSC Trusts Children and Young People Services

The regional guidance on the provision of family group conferences (2008) was produced by a multi-agency task group; membership included the FGC Managers and operational managers from children's services across the five Trust areas.
This review of the guidance was agreed and signed off by The Children's Services Improvement Board for NI in November 2011

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“I have a three year old grandson. He is the love of my life. He is a handsome wee man; he has sandy hair and a Maori nose. He is naughty, he has been known to throw the odd tantrum and there is no denying he is very spoilt.”

My plea to you as a fellow professional is:

Should my Caleb ever come to your attention, should you ever have a professional role to play with him, should you be a social worker, or a lawyer or a co-ordinator or a judge – this is what you must do…

- *You must find his Nana*
- *You must find his aunts and uncles and cousins and friends*
- *You must find his whanu, hapu, iwi – (kin) – even if he does not know them, they will know him*
- *You must ensure he is surrounded by those who love him and are connected to him*
- *You must not send him to strangers without our consent and involvement*
- *You must move heaven and earth to protect him, remembering he is “mine” not yours.”*

Shannon Pakura
Chief Social Worker
New Zealand 2005

1. An Introduction to Family Group Conferences

A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a family led decision making process in which a child or young person's wider family and friends come together in a meeting (conference) to develop a plan which protects and supports the child/young person in the family. Family refers to the network beyond the immediate nuclear family. It encompasses both blood relations and other people significant to the child and their carers. (See Appendix One – Key Principles)

The FGC model is an inclusive enabling and empowering process, which places the child and family at the centre, providing them with an opportunity to have their voices heard in relation to plans made for their child.

As the Family is the key decision making group in an FGC, the role of the professionals is to provide clear unambiguous information about the matters of concern. This should be explicit, with Professionals clear about their respective roles and responsibilities. The information provided will enable the family members to make an informed plan, which meets the identified needs of the child/young person.

An FGC is not a one-off meeting. It is a structured process which enables families to take responsibility, to whatever degree they feel they can, for addressing the identified concerns. The process itself may act as a catalyst and galvanize support or action from family members when concerns are brought to their attention. In such cases the process may not culminate in an actual Conference but the necessary outcome will have been generated and achieved through the preparation stage. The involvement of the wider family network is inherent to the FGC process. It emphasises the strengths, skills, knowledge and commitment of the extended family working together for the benefit of the child.

The FGC is organized and facilitated by an independent Co-ordinator who has no prior knowledge of, involvement with or statutory responsibility for the family.

The plan, which is produced by a family at an FGC, should be agreed and resourced by the referring Agency, providing it ensures the safety of the child/children/young person and adequately addresses the identified concerns of the referring Agency.

The involvement of the wider family network and the central position of the child/young person within the FGC process are in keeping with legislative and policy initiatives directly related to the Care and Rights of children/young people. These include:

- The Children (NI) Order 1995
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Care Matters – a Bridge to a Better Future DHSSPS (2007)
- Children (Leaving Care) Act NI 2002
- Cooperating to Safeguard Children (Regional Policy and Procedures)
- Regional Policy on Permanence
- Guide to Case Management in Public Law Proceedings
- Family Group Conference Standards FGC Forum(NI) 2010
- Standards for Kinship Foster Carers in NI (May 2012).

2. When is a FGC appropriate?

The flexibility of the FGC model enables this approach to be used across the continuum of child care practice, which includes, Family Support, Child Protection, Looked after Children, Permanency Planning and Young People Leaving Care.

Referrals to the Trust's FGC service should be considered in any situation where the following criteria are met:

- Concerns are identified about the welfare of a child/young person which requires a decision to be made
- A Trust Social Worker is involved in the case.

Given the emphasis in Legislation, Policy and Planning on **early intervention**, the optimal time for referral to the FGC service is as soon as possible following the identification of concerns.

An FGC must always be considered in the following situations:

2.1 When a child/young person is assessed to be in need and requiring support;

2.2 When a child/young person is at risk of abuse or subject to Child Protection Procedures;

2.3 When a child/young person requires to be accommodated by a Trust (Article 21);

2.4 When Care proceedings are being considered and/or pre-proceedings are being initiated, or are underway in respect of a child/young person

2.5 When a child/young person is subject to LAC review procedures in any placement, where reunification with parents/extended family is to be explored or where supports are required to maintain a placement

2.6 When a child is to remain looked after and there is a need to explore/strengthen the contact/links between child/parents/ siblings/extended families

2.7 When there is a need to consider or review kinship placements in order to maximise support and ensure the safety and stability of placement

2.8 Where a child is in a foster care placement, each situation is unique and needs to be considered carefully. At the referral stage the field social worker and the FGC coordinator will determine the appropriateness of and level of involvement of the foster carers in the FGC process, taking into account the purpose of the conference.

2.9 When a child is being considered for a permanent placement eg. adoption, Residence Order (Regional Policy on Permanence);

2.10 When young people are leaving care and embarking on independent living;

2.11 When 16 & 17 year olds present as homeless and are children in need

2.12 Where a referral for an FGC is considered at a statutory decision making forum, it is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the decision to refer is recorded and any reasons for not referring at that time are also recorded. Examples of such meetings are:

- Family Support/Case Planning Meeting
- Child Protection Case Conference/Review
- LAC Review
- Pathway Planning Review
- Pre-proceedings Meeting
- Any other relevant Meeting.

The above list is not exhaustive; it indicates, however the diversity of situations where an FGC could be appropriate.

3. Referral Process

3.1 Concerns are identified about the welfare of a child/children/ young person, which requires a decision to be made and which meets the Trusts' criteria for referral to the FGC Service

3.2 The decision to pursue a referral for an FGC is made by the Trust Social Worker and should be endorsed by the social worker's line manager and recorded on file

3.3 The social worker shares information on the FGC model and its potential benefits with the family, in order to seek informed consent to the referral (Refer to Appendix 2 - Consents)

3.4 Consent for referral to the FGC Service must be sought from a person with Parental Responsibility. However, good practice indicates that children and young people are consulted about having an FGC and that consent is sought from all Young people aged 16 or over

3.5 This consent is required for a referral to proceed. The ethos of the FGC model is empowerment and working in true partnership, so every effort should be made to engage a parent in the process. If a parent is unwilling to proceed and the Trust has Parental Responsibility (under a Court Order) and it is deemed to be in the child's best interests to do so, the Trust can consent to the FGC progressing

3.6 Where a parent does consent to the FGC progressing, the wider family may not be willing or able to engage in the process. However every effort will be made by the FGC coordinator to explore potential participation. There will also be situations where there is no extended family network available to offer support to a child/young person. Identification of the lack of resources can be helpful to agencies who are formulating a plan for a child's welfare. There may also be situations where family dynamics are assessed as being so unsafe or dangerous that a referral for an FGC is not appropriate

3.7 The FGC Manager and/or Team Leader will discuss the referral with the Trust Social Worker and/ or Team Leader to ensure that the aims of the FGC, the information to be shared and the Trust's bottom line are clear, as well as the Trust's commitment to agreeing and providing resources for the Family Plan, if required

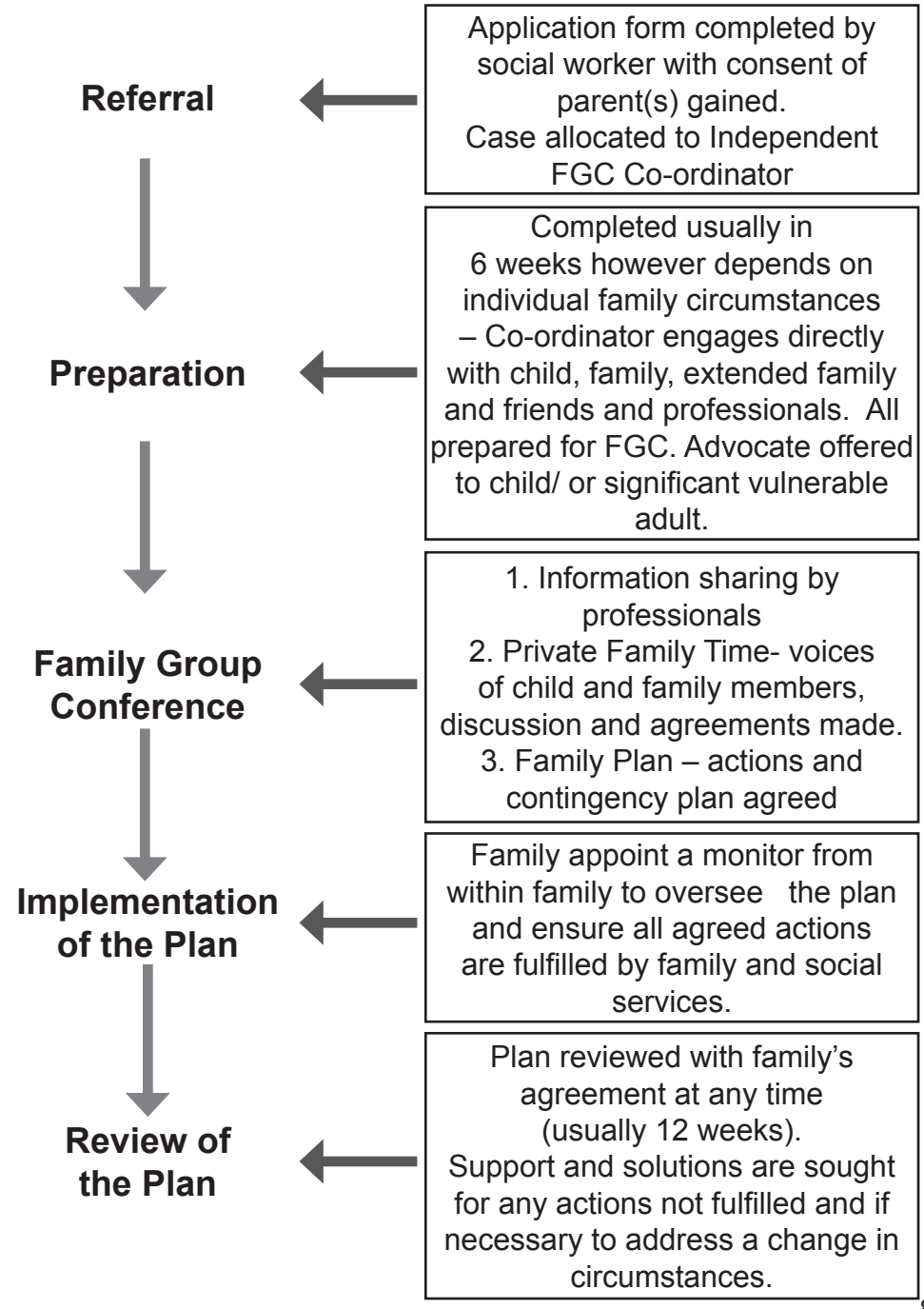
3.8 The "bottom line" represents the Trust's non-negotiable position in relation to safeguarding and promoting the child/ young person's welfare (where failure to address identified concerns could lead to further action – Child protection procedures/pre-proceedings/legal advice being sought/or the child received into Care). The "bottom line" may also confirm other conditions eg. who the child/young person can/cannot have contact with

3.9 The FGC Team Leader will allocate the referral to an Independent Coordinator

- The Independent Coordinator has no present or previous involvement with or statutory responsibility for the family
- The role of the Coordinator is to use their independence and objectivity to facilitate bringing together the family and the professionals in the best interests of the child/ young person. **The Independence and perceived Independence of the Coordinator is therefore crucial.**

3.10 Not all referrals for an FGC will result in family engagement or a successful FGC, although there may be benefits for the child/young person in exploring the process and identifying resources or lack of same within a supportive network.

4. The Family Group Conference Process



5. Preparation for an FGC

5.1 The Independent Coordinator meets with the referring Social Worker and/or Team Leader to confirm an agreed understanding of the purpose and process of the FGC and that consent to share information has been agreed

5.2 The Independent Coordinator meets with the person with Parental Responsibility, and the child/young person in order to ensure full understanding of the process and to identify the family network

5.3 The Independent Coordinator makes contact with all identified family/friends and begins the process of engaging them, provides full information about the FGC process and prepares them for the conference

5.4 The Coordinator identifies if necessary the need for advocacy for the child/young person and any other significant participant who is deemed to be vulnerable, to ensure their voices are heard at the FGC (please see Appendix Four - Advocacy)

5.5 Where an advocate is involved the Coordinator ensures that they are properly informed about their role in the FGC

5.6 The Coordinator should adopt creative means to ensure all contributions from significant others who are unable to attend the conference, are shared. Eg. Letter from father in prison; video tape from grandmother with health problems

5.7 There may be exceptional circumstances when it is deemed to be unsafe or inappropriate to invite a family member. This decision will ultimately be taken by the Co-ordinator following discussion with the family and referring social worker

5.8 The Independent Coordinator in agreement with the family makes contact with any relevant professional. The Co-ordinator will invite them and prepare them for the FGC

5.9 Solicitors and Guardians Ad Litem do not normally attend a FGC as the emphasis is on problem solving away from the Court arena. However, if either professional has information to contribute which may assist the family in developing a plan to protect or support the child/young person, attendance would be possible with the agreement of family members. If a Solicitor or Guardian Ad Litem does attend a FGC it would be for the information giving and final parts of the meeting only and not **private family time**

5.10 The Independent Coordinator negotiates the date, time and venue for the FGC with all parties and makes all the practical arrangements

5.11 It is important to be aware of the timing of an FGC in relation to other relevant statutory or court processes. Consideration should be given to bringing forward or delaying such events, to facilitate the agreement of a plan from an FGC (except in an emergency, or if delay would conflict with a statutory requirement). In some cases the Chair (ie. Social Work Service Managers or above) of the statutory meeting should consider rescheduling the meeting.

6. The Family Group Conference

The FGC is in three parts

6.1 Information Giving Stage

- The conference opens with the Coordinator welcoming everyone and clarifying both the purpose and process of the FCG
- The ground rules are discussed and agreed
- The coordinator then facilitates information giving time.

The Coordinator also clarifies that the only record from the meeting will be the Family Plan. This will include the names of those who attended, issues/concerns that the Social Worker wishes the FGC to consider, the Social Worker's summary of strengths and resources, actions agreed by the family and resources required to deliver the plan. There is no minute kept of the conference. It is important that all participants in the process are aware that the Plan made at the FGC may be made available to the Court.

- The Social Worker and any relevant professional, provide clear, concise, and concrete information about the issues to be addressed. Significant new information should not be introduced at the Conference. The social worker should address the following points during the information giving part of the conference,
    - existing strengths of the family;
    - the Social Worker's concerns and the issues which the family need to address;
    - Supports and resources available, including those already in place;
    - any procedural or legislative requirements ie. assessments for any alternative family arrangements or court process;
    - Clarity about the Trust's non-negotiable position ie. the likely actions if change does not occur including the timescales for this.

- The family can seek clarification about the information shared
- The child's views and any anxieties are shared with the FGC - This may be in person, in writing, provided by an advocate or in a creative format
- The contributions of those unable to attend are shared by the coordinator or a nominated person in the conference.

6.2 Private Family Time

- The Coordinator and professionals withdraw from the room leaving the family to formulate a plan which addresses the concerns raised
- The family may identify resources and support which are required from the agencies involved as well as from the family
- The family has several basic tasks:
  - To develop a plan that addresses the concerns
  - To create a contingency plan
  - To identify the supports and resources required
  - To identify a family member to monitor the family plan.

The Coordinator and social worker will be available outside the room during family time, in case the family need them for clarification, or to assist the process. There may be exceptional times when the Coordinator remains in private family time, but only when specifically requested by the family to do so.

An advocate may also remain for private family time if requested to do so by the family.

6.3 Agreeing the Family Plan

Once a plan is formulated by the family, the Coordinator and Social Worker rejoin the meeting.

- It is the responsibility of the Trust's Social Worker at the FGC to agree the plan of action formulated by the family
- The only reason for not agreeing the plan **is if it places the child or young person at risk of significant harm or if it conflicts with the Trust's general duty under Article 18 or a specific duty under Article 66 of the Children (NI) Order 1995**
- Any reasons for not accepting the plan must be made clear immediately and the family given the opportunity to respond to the concerns and perhaps change, or add to the plan
- It is important to ensure that any child/young person present has a clear understanding of what is decided and that their views are understood
- There should be a clear agreement about how and by whom decisions are shared with a child/young person, who has not been present at the Conference
- Monitoring and reviewing arrangements should be agreed. Both the family's and the professional's role in monitoring the plan should be clearly set out
- It is the responsibility of the Co-ordinator to ensure that the final plan is recorded in agreement with the family
- Following the FGC the Coordinator is responsible for circulating the family plan to all who attended and to agree and organise a review date if agreed by the family
- When an FGC has occurred it is the responsibility of the field social worker in agreement with the family, to ensure that the family plan is presented at relevant statutory meetings and that the chair should ask to see the Family Plan prior to any such meeting

6.4 Review of the Family Group Conference Plan

A review FGC should be arranged at the initial FGC to ensure that the agreed plan is working, or to make adjustments if required. The review usually takes place around 12 weeks following the FGC; however participants can request a review FGC at any time. It is the family's decision whether to progress the FGC review.

7.0 Interfaces with other policy and procedures

FGC will potentially link with the three aspects of the childcare systems i.e. Child in need; child protection and Looked After Children including young people leaving care.

The following is a guide as to how these processes may link:

A) Child in Need

- Using the UNOCINI guidance documentation the need for a referral to an FGC is very likely to be identified subsequent to the completion of the first child in need Case Plan, or in any review of a child In need case plan
- A case plan will have the authority to detail the purpose of the FGC: identification of the “bottom line”. The bottom line represents the Trust’s non-negotiable position in relation to securing the child/young person’s welfare (eg. without change which addresses the concerns Child Protection Procedures will be initiated / legal advice will be sought / the child may have to be received into care / the child may not have contact with specified person).
- Future case plans in taking account of the reviewed needs of the family, should take account of whether the family plan, or other plans also continue to meet those needs. While those revising the case plan do not have the authority to change the Family Plan, proposed changes should be considered at the review FGC.

B) Child Protection

An Initial Child Protection Case Conference could recommend an FGC as one recommendation in the Child Protection Plan.

- The initial Child Protection Case Conference: chaired at senior manager level has the authority to agree appropriateness of this referral and should clearly identify the “bottom line” or any Trust requirements that the FGC is to address
- Following the FGC the Core Group should use its authority to consider and ratify the family plan and any subsequent family plans.

C) LAC System

- The case co-Coordinator of a LAC case has the authority to agree the Family Plan in consultation with those with Parental Responsibility, the child or young person, and other key professionals.

8. Timescales for Family Group Conference Process

8.1 Following a decision to refer a family for an FGC the social worker should seek the informed consent of the person with PR and make the referral **within 7 working days**

8.2 The FGC process should be completed **within 6-8 weeks** of allocation to a coordinator but this will depend on individual family circumstances. Every effort should be made by social workers and managers to give the FGC process priority and to cooperate with the Coordinator in holding the FGC as soon as the family is ready. If a family do not proceed to a full FGC the Co-ordinator will confirm this in writing with the family and the referrer

8.3 If there is a delay in agreeing the plan eg. if it cannot be agreed at the FGC and has to go back to other decision makers in the Trust, it must happen **within three weeks** of the conference

8.4 Specific decisions which require the Trust's agreement eg. financial assistance must be agreed and communicated to the family **within 5 days** of the FGC.

Appendix One

Key Principles

a. Children and young people are central to the FGC process and have the right to have their voices heard.

b. Children and young people have the right to have their families fully involved in future planning for them.

c. Families have the right and responsibility to be active decision makers about their family members.

d. Given the right information families can make informed, safe decisions about how the needs of a child/children or young person can be met.

e. **'Family'** refers to the network beyond the immediate family. It encompasses both blood relations and other people who are significant to the child and their carers.

f. FGC is a voluntary process. Each family is unique and its culture and communication style is respected and embedded in the process.

g. FGC is a strengths-based, solution focused intervention, which acknowledges the positives as well as addressing the needs and challenges in a family.

h. FGC is safe and feasible for most families. It works alongside investigative Child Protection and other statutory processes, it does not replace them.

i. The FGC Co-ordinator is always independent of any professional involvement with the family. The independence of the Co-ordinator is a critical factor in the process and must be preserved.

j. Private time for the family is an essential component of the Family Group Conference process.

Appendix Two

Consent to an FGC

Legislative Background

Family as First Care Option for Children

The Children (NI) Order 1995 - Article 26(2) states:-

Before making a decision with respect to a child whom it is looking after or proposing to look after, an authority shall, so far as is reasonably practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of:-

(a) The child;
(b) His/her parents;
(c) Any person who is not a parent of his/her but who has Parental Responsibility for him/her;
(d) Any other persons whose wishes and feelings the authority considers to be relevant;

In making any such decision an authority shall give due consideration:

(a) Having regard to his/her age and understanding, to such wishes and feelings of the child as the authority has been able to ascertain;
(b) To such wishes and feelings of any person mentioned in paragraph (2) (b) to (d) as the authority has been able to ascertain.

Article 27(7) further confirms:

- Subject to any regulations made by the department for the purpose of this paragraph, any authority looking after a child shall make arrangements to enable him to live with:

    (a) A person falling within paragraph 4 (basically a parent or someone with parental responsibility or someone with a Residence Order).
    (b) A relative, friend or other person connected with him unless that would not be reasonably practicable or consistent with his welfare.

- This sets the imperative and impetus to look at family as the first option prior to considering statutory care. A parent can however, refuse to participate or can deny access to alternative carers from within the family/extended family/friends network by withholding names etc.

Consent of Persons with Parental Responsibility to an FGC

Consent to the holding of an FGC must be obtained from a person with Parental Responsibility. Only one parent (person) with parental responsibility needs to give consent to enable the FGC to proceed.

- Where parents refuse consent to the holding of an FGC it is necessary to explore why an FGC is being considered in these circumstances
- It is important that the benefits of and alternatives to the holding of an FGC are properly explained to the family so that they are fully informed when they make their decision. **FGCs are not mandatory and families can refuse if they wish**
- If however, a child has been admitted to care or admission to care is being considered, then the legislation encourages the Trust to progress their efforts via the FGC model as a means of acquitting their statutory responsibility to explore family alternatives.
- In cases where the opposition of the parent to the process is considered unreasonable, i.e. preventing a child having an experience of family life or denied opportunities to which he/ she is entitled, this could be considered as interfering with the child's rights (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), then legal advice should be sought by the child/ young person's social worker to ensure that the paramouncy principle is observed.

As in all situations, the action taken should be informed and proportionate to the degree of assessed seriousness. All actions taken should be proportionate, particularly in light of the ethos of the model. Legal advice should always be sought by the child's social worker where the views and actions of a parent conflict with the best interests of the child.

Consent of Child/Young People to the holding of a Family Group Conference

- It is good practice that children and young people are consulted about having an FGC. In some cases young people who are adamant that they do not want an FGC are unlikely to work with any plan emanating from one in which they took no part. Children of all ages are encouraged to participate in FGCs. The degree and manner of participation will depend on their age and understanding
- Parents retain Parental Responsibility for their child/young person until they reach 18 years, though as the child acquires more competence the degree to which parents exercise Parental Responsibility reduces
- Young people under the age of 18 years can make some decisions for themselves and it would be reasonable for the consent of a young person aged between 16 and 18 years to be required for an FGC to be convened and for the plan to be agreed. For children under 16 years it is a more complex area. Whether or not a child's views should override those of a parent is not spelt out in statute but can be derived from case law: "The Fraser Guidelines" suggest that where a child or young person has the intelligence and maturity to be able to understand the nature and consequences of his/her choice, their consent should be acquired
- If there is a disagreement between the child and his/her parents about holding an FGC, which can not be resolved, legal advice should be sought
- If a decision is made to proceed with a Family Group Conference without consent of a person with Parental Responsibility, the information shared should focus on the needs of the young person who has given consent. The aim of the FGC should clearly reflect the needs of the young person so that participants can make realistic decisions about the support they can offer.

Appendix Three

Roles and responsibilities

Role and Responsibilities of the Social Worker/ Team Leader / Information Giver:

- To have knowledge and understanding of the FGC model and their role within it
- To determine the appropriateness of referral to an FGC
- To be clear about the reason and purpose for an FGC
- To ensure the Trust's commitment to agreeing and providing resources where appropriate for the family plan
- To carry out all required statutory duties
- To initially explain the FGC model to the family and the reasons why this service could be of benefit
- To meet with the FGC Co-ordinator to discuss the referral
- To be the identified worker who will follow the FGC process and attend the FGC. The social worker and the Team Leader may attend the FGC
- To attend the FGC, to be clear about the Trust's non-negotiable position if change does not occur and the timescales around this
- To provide clear, good quality information for the "information-giving" stage, being clear about support, care and protection issues and potential supports
- Be prepared to answer questions raised by the family to promote their understanding
- To provide information about resources available and accessibility to these
- Identification and attendance of professionals at the FGC needs to be agreed with the family

- To agree the plan, ensuring that decisions, recommendations and plans from the FGC meet the care and protection needs of the child/young person
- To support the family to carry out their plan
- To ensure that all resources identified are provided to the family

Role of Referring Social Worker at the Family Group Conference

Referrer must provide a brief outline of:

- The family's strengths
- Why the Agency is involved and for how long; the role of the Social Worker; the main concerns, which require a plan to be made; the likely outcome if a plan does not resolve matters
- The resources currently in place; resources, services, information, which could be available for the family - timescales, if known
- Any procedural requirements, ie assessments, Policy and Procedures, which will need to be followed
- As far as possible to ensure that no new information is introduced at the FGC, so that there are no "surprises" for family.

The Role of the referring social worker's Team Leader:

- Be clear about the reasons for referral and the issues about which the family are being asked to make a plan
- Understand that it is the family who are the decision makers within this context - if there are any limitations to this, the referrer must clearly articulate these from the outset

- It is critical to be conscious of the timing of statutory meetings or reviews, which may impact on the FGC. Consideration should be given to bringing forward or delaying (except in an emergency or if delay would conflict with a statutory requirement) Statutory Meetings, to facilitate the agreement of a plan from an FGC. In some cases the Chair (ie. APSW or above) of the statutory meeting should make a decision about rescheduling the meeting.

Role and Responsibilities of the FGC Co-ordinator

- The Independent Coordinator has no prior knowledge of, involvement with or statutory responsibility for the family. Their role is to utilise their independence and objectivity, to facilitate bringing together the family and the professionals in the best interests of the child/young person. Independence and perceived independence of the Coordinator is therefore very important
- To meet with the referrer to discuss the referral
- To clarify roles/responsibilities/expectations of all participants
- To ensure the child and family are fully informed about the FGC process and the reason the referral has been made
- To explore the wider family network
- To engage the child, parents, all family members and significant others in the process
- To prepare all participants for the FGC prior to it happening
- To identify advocacy for the child/young person and any other significant participant who is deemed to be vulnerable, to ensure their voices are heard at the FGC
- To ensure that where advocacy is required for any child/young person or significant adult who is vulnerable, that the advocate is properly informed about their role in the FGC

- To adopt creative means to ensure all significant contributions are stated at the FGC eg. letter from father in prison, video tape from housebound grandmother
- To organise the practicalities of the FGC
- To convene the FGC on behalf of the family and to invite all participants to the FGC
- To facilitate/chair the information-giving stage
- To ensure all family members have clear information from the professionals
- To keep all participants focused on the issues and purpose of the FGC
- To ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are heard at the FGC
- There may be times when the Coordinator decides not to invite some family members, taking into account risk issues and after discussion with the family and referring social worker
- To be available to the family throughout their "private time"
- To help the family formulate their plan
- To facilitate the family's presentation of their plan to the professional/s
- To circulate copies of the family plan to all those who attended
- To agree review date and organise the FGC Review meeting.

Appendix Four

Advocacy for children, young people and adults:

- Advocacy is about speaking up for children and young people. Some adults may also feel they need this service, particularly if they have learning disabilities or mental health problems. Advocacy is about empowering children and people to ensure that their rights are respected and their views and wishes heard
- Advocacy is about representing their views, wishes and needs to decision makers and helping them to navigate the system
- The role of the Advocate/Supporter must be considered for any child/young person or vulnerable adult at the FGC
- The Advocate must be Independent and have no decision-making role in the FGC process
- Support and Advocacy should ensure that the voice of the Child/ Young Person is heard and can be provided in a variety of ways.

The Co-ordinator should discuss with the child how they will get their views heard and what support they require. Some will decline any extra help even when all the implications are considered. Others will look for emotional rather than practical support at the meeting (hand holding) while they have their say and/or will identify people who they would like to help them speak at the meeting.

Informal Advocacy:

- Someone from within the extended family/friends network with assistance from the co-ordinator to help them fulfil this role effectively
- A professional known to the child/young person or adult whom they identify as important in their life, ie. teacher, residential worker, personal advisor, peer advocacy
- Someone from the child or adult's Peer Group.
  The Co-ordinator will need to ensure that informal or peer advocates are sufficiently informed and supported, to ensure that the child's voice is heard.

- Whilst there are issues which need to be considered if support/ advocacy is to be provided from informal or peer networks, it is important that children, young people and vulnerable adults have choice about how and by whom they are supported to participate in an FGC. It is the role of the co-ordinator to ensure that they are properly informed and supported to do so.

Formal Advocacy:

- An advocate from an Advocacy Organisation
- An advocate provided by the FGC Service, eg. a current co-ordinator. This will be a distinct and separate role from the co-ordinating role.

Useful contact numbers

Southern Health and Social Care Trust Barnardo's Northern Ireland BELIEVE IN CHILDREN	Southern HSC Trust Area FGC Service - Barnardo's	(028) 3752 8102 07962 567 246
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	Northern HSC Trust Area FGC Service	(028) 9034 1581
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	South Eastern HSC Trust and Belfast HSC Trust Area FGC Service	(028) 9151 2153
Western Health and Social Care Trust	Western HSC Trust Area FGC Service	(028) 7131 4080
FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE LEADING PRACTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND	Family Group Conference (NI) Forum (Mena Wilson)	(028) 9070 5495 www.fgcni.org