



# Family Group Conferencing Ontario Provincial Resource

ISSUE # 4

SPRING / SUMMER 2010

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Case Stories
- Provincial Resource Update
- Training Activities

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## PROVINCIAL RESOURCE UPDATE



The working group revising our training materials has completed the work on the Basic and Advanced training slides. The next goal is to revise the FGC Coordinators' Manual. It is expected that the work on the manual will begin early summer.

The Youth Transitioning into Adulthood working group has completed revisions to the brochure geared to child welfare staff on the use of FGC/FGDM as a planning tool with youth. The brochure reflects the expansion of the criteria and the \$25 honorarium given to youth for the participation in the research study. The plan is to distribute the brochure to child welfare staff across Ontario.

In our continuous efforts to engage youth to consider FGC/FGDM as a planning tool, a bookmark was developed and has been printed for distribution. We began distribution with our Steering Committee and plan to make it available to youth through the OACAS. Our intent is to make the bookmarks accessible to youth, so that youth will consider asking their workers for a referral to FGC/FGDM. Bookmarks will also be available to FGC/FGDM coordinators at our Professional Development Day activities.

In our attempt to build regional capacity for FGC/FGDM coordinators, trainers and mentors, we are pleased to announce the addition of two trainers to the Roster, Victoria Norgaard and Maryanne King from the Eastern region. Maryanne has also been approved as a mentor and has been added to the Roster of Mentors.

The Provincial Resource has established a formal process of approving trainers and mentors. The first step is to complete an application and subsequently go through an interview process. Interviews are conducted face to face by an Admissions Committee, however if needed due to distance constraints video conferencing is an option.

As our fiscal year ends, we are in the process of establishing the goals for the next year. We will continue to focus on the projects at hand, provide consultation, support regions with capacity building, and continue to carry out our role as a quality assurance body.

Carolina Pizarro, Provincial Resource Staff

## Training Activities

### FGC Basic and Advanced Training Spring/Summer 2010

Basic Training- April 28, 2010

Advanced Training—April 29, 2010

Contact: Luc Rodrigue at: [lrodrigue@ccnsudbury.on.ca](mailto:lrodrigue@ccnsudbury.on.ca) or

(705)-566-3416 ext. 2460

Number of people trained from April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010

Basic: 108

Advanced: 105

## Commitment to a Special Little Girl

A young baby girl arrived at the hospital with a number of bruises all over her body, broken bones, a bloody nose and she later experienced a stroke. She spent a period of time with many specialized medical professionals while in the hospital and was later apprehended by the Children's Aid Society and placed in foster care. She remained in the same foster home for her first year of life and received supervised access to her parents and her maternal grandmother on a consistent basis. Just before the child's first birthday, a referral was made to FGDM. Because of the substantial safety concerns, the parents were not able to be in a primary care giving role to the child nor were they able to reside in the same home as the potential caregivers of the child. The objective of the meeting was to create a permanent plan for the child.

After several weeks of preparation, a total of 32 participants attended the meeting. The meeting was scheduled for a Saturday morning starting at 10:00 a.m. and carried on into the late hours of the evening. The family was very committed to the development of a plan however at one point identified that they were too emotionally and physically exhausted and requested to return on the Monday.

On Monday within two and a half hours of commencing the meeting, the plan was completed, presented to CAS and accepted. The plan presented involved the paternal grandparents becoming the child's primary caregivers in filing for custody and completing the outlined transition schedule.

The parents will continue to remain actively involved in the child's life having transportation and accommodations provided for them to alleviate any barriers. Other areas of the plan that were submitted were: access to the child by the family group, physical and emotional needs, financial needs and contributions, medical needs, educational needs, and a conflict resolution plan. On the next scheduled court date, CAS will be withdrawing their court application and advising that they are in agreement with the paternal grandparents filing for custody. This child will then be discharged from the system and placed with the paternal grandparents.

While closing the meeting on Monday, one participant reflected to the group that because of his involvement in this process, he now knows what he would like to do with the next phase of his life. Another participant stated that she felt that her family had just grown bigger and expressed how lucky this little girl is to have so many people surrounding her who love and care about her, stating "this is a solid plan".

**Tammy Geisler, FGDM Coordinator, Nipissing & Parry Sound CAS, North East Region**

## Family Group Conferencing in the South East Region -Only one way to go and that's UP!

Family Group Conferencing began in the south east with a few dedicated champions and a belief that it was a matter of time until families and child protection workers would appreciate the benefits of FGC and take advantage of this service in their own jurisdiction.

We have been patient. Not only was the matter of time an issue but also the matter of trained coordinators prepared to provide the services locally. At the same time, we saw the need to be in a position to offer both agency and community support to increase the understanding of FGC.

Our recent application for an EBBS grant was successful and we were off to a quick start offering a 2 day training opportunity in both basic and advanced FGC. We registered a full contingent.

Darlene Sykes travelled to Belleville, Ontario to provide the training at the Hasting CAS who

generously offered to be our host. Supervisors from 4 of our 6 CASs attended along with committed staff. Comments made at the conclusion of the 2 days reinforced the power of this intervention and the need to continue to provide sessions of a similar nature.

We have 3 candidates at different stages of mentoring and our goal is to have all 3 mentored and eligible for the roster by March 2011. We have two individuals currently on the roster and the additional coordinators will augment our resources to 5 coordinators.

Our EBBS grant funds have permitted us to develop pamphlets for distribution within the 6 counties. This will not only increase our profile but also provide written information to families, service providers and the legal community. At the same time, our goal is

to offer customized training in each of our 6 jurisdictions for each CAS and their legal community.

In jurisdictions where there has been training within the CAS and the legal community we have experienced an increase in FGC referrals. We want to ensure that we can provide the service locally and within a reasonably prompt period of time. We are looking forward to the increased referrals and the ability to provide the service.

To this end, it is our strong belief that FGC needs to be available for any family and in any jurisdiction in the South East.

**Marilyn Brooks, ADR Coordinator  
South East Region**

***"Our goal is to offer customized training in each of the 6 jurisdictions for each CAS and their legal community"***

## FGC/FGDM WITH YOUTH: THE CHALLENGES AND THE FUN!

When a coordinator is preparing a FGC/FGDM circle where the planning is for a youth, there are several areas to carefully consider:

### **What is the legal status of the youth?**

The youth may be living with a parent, with kin or with a community member. The coordinator needs to know if there is an existing legal custody order for the youth, so that the FGC/FGDM plan is not in violation of that existing order unless the custodial parent agrees.

The youth may be in temporary foster care. The coordinator needs to know when this order expires and whether the child welfare agency intends to apply for crown wardship or not.

The youth may be a crown ward. The coordinator needs to carefully consider who this youth's family is. What is the role of the foster parent, especially if the youth has lived with this foster family for several years? Are the extended family members of the biological family as well as the foster family invited? How often has the youth had access with his biological family? Are there any legal constraints around that access? Sometimes there are challenges in widening the circle for the crown ward youth, particularly if this youth has been in care for a long time and has had little contact with their biological family while in care.

### **Does the youth 'buy into' the FGC/FGDM process?**

This can be a delicate dance for the coordinator. Usually this dance involves the youth's child welfare worker, the youth's family, the Office of the Children's lawyer, others the youth trusts, and the coordinator.

When the youth is in conflict with their biological family, the coordinator needs to carefully consider how to widen the circle. Sometimes family members may feel frustrated and worn out by the ongoing conflict with the youth. Sometimes the youth may feel that their family does not understand them or support them. The youth may be afraid that no one will come to the FGC/FGDM.

### **Is the youth involved with the Youth Criminal Justice system?**

When the youth is involved with the Youth Criminal Justice system, the coordinator may need to know any court orders affecting the youth including any probation orders. The role of the probation officer needs to be determined.

### **Does the youth struggle with mental health or addiction issues?**

If the youth has mental health or addiction issues, the coordinator needs to carefully consider how this will affect the youth's 'buy in' for the FGC/FGDM process. The coordinator also needs to carefully consider how to present this information to the youth when the FGC/FGDM planning is about how to help the youth with these struggles.

### **Financial issues for kin caring for youth**

When the youth is not in care but not living with a parent, financial support issues can sometimes become quite challenging. The coordinator needs to ask the child welfare agency to be clear about what financial support they are able to offer or other sources of financial support the kin are able to access, as part of preparing the child welfare workers to attend the FGC/FGDM.

### **What if you can't find the youth?**

Sometimes it can be a challenge to arrange to meet with a youth in the preparation phase. The coordinator may need to be creative about the location for meeting with the youth as well as asking those the youth trusts to help arrange the meeting. The OCL, if appointed, may also need to be flexible and creative in finding ways to meet with the youth.

Sometimes the youth may be difficult to locate as the day of the FGC/FGDM is approaching, and the coordinator may worry that the youth will not attend the meeting. It is important for the coordinator to consult with the family group and with the agency workers about whether or not to proceed if the youth does not attend.

### **How to prepare the youth for the FGC/FGDM?**

It will be important for the coordinator, OCL, youth's child welfare worker and trusted adults in the youth's life to help the youth understand that they have a voice at the FGC/FGDM, but that the whole group will be making the decisions. The youth will need to consider what areas are open to compromise on their part and what areas are not, as well as deciding how to share this with the group.

### **What if the youth can't 'live with' the plan developed at the FGC/FGDM?**

If the group is worried about this happening at the FGC/FGDM, during the preparation phase the coordinator needs to help family members, the youth, and the child welfare workers think about how to handle this should it occur.

### **Sometimes preparation for a FGC/FGDM with youth takes longer than when the child is younger**

Be prepared for these FGC/FGDM's to take longer. It may take several meetings before the youth 'buys in'. Meetings may need to be coordinated with the OCL, if one has been appointed. The coordinator may need to make several attempts to meet with the youth before a meeting actually occurs.

**Marilee Sherry, FGDM Coordinator, Hamilton/Niagara Region**



## FGC Ontario Provincial Resource

c/o The George Hull Centre for Children and Families  
600 The East Mall, 3rd floor  
Toronto, ON  
M9B 4B1

Phone: 416-622-8833 ext. 412

Fax: 416-622-7068

E-mail: [cpizarro@georgehull.on.ca](mailto:cpizarro@georgehull.on.ca)

Website: <http://www.georgehullcentre.on.ca/FGCPR>

## Next Professional Development Day

OCTOBER 2010

## Next Issue of the Newsletter

October 2010

If interested in submitting an article,  
please contact Carolina Pizarro at  
[cpizarro@georgehull.on.ca](mailto:cpizarro@georgehull.on.ca)

Visit our website for an electronic-copy of this issue at  
[www.georgehullcentre.on.ca/FGCPR](http://www.georgehullcentre.on.ca/FGCPR)



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## The whole is always greater than the sum of its parts

- Aristotle

There are often roadblocks for the Coordinator when trying to widen the circle and add more "parts." Family members might question why others (especially those from outside their family circle) are included and may not see the value others will bring to the "whole."

I recently coordinated a conference for a transient teenage mother and her baby. The baby had been in care for several months and the hope was for the family to come up with a plan to care for the child. The mother wanted her current partner to attend the conference, and through my preparation with him I learned that he had a history of mental health issues as well as a criminal past. When family members learned this new boyfriend was participating, they questioned the benefit of his attendance. On the morning of the conference the mother called to say she had changed her mind and would not be attending. It was only through

phone calls with her boyfriend that she eventually agreed to attend. When the boyfriend arrived, he made no eye contact with the family; his hands were shaking, and he continued to shake through the meeting. I could see the family members look at each other and I could guess what they were all thinking. As the meeting went on the boyfriend remained quiet but respectfully listened to what was being discussed.

During the Family Private Time things got heated between the mother and her family. The mother left the room on numerous occasions, slamming the door and saying she would not return. It was only the boyfriend who was able to convince her to reconsider. He was the one who sat patiently with her in the parking lot at times for up to an hour until she was ready to return to the group. While he did not contribute to the "plan" in the traditional way we think of, he played a crucial

role. He encouraged the mother to remain a part of the conference process, which was very important to the extended family who wanted to ensure she was in agreement with the final plan they were presenting. After the conference, the boyfriend shared with me that he had been adopted as a child, and that he wished that there had been a Family Group Conference for him so that he could have lived with family members rather than be bounced from foster home to foster home.

I have learned through my experience with FGC to never underestimate the contribution a participant can make leading up to and on the day of the conference. There is no doubt when it comes to Family Group Conferencing that the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts.

**Alison Cope, FGC Coordinator,  
Toronto Region**