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Family Group Conferencing Ontario Provincial Resource

ISSUE # 6

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PROVINCIAL RESOURCE UPDATE



PD Day Activities October 2010

The Provincial Resource held its 7th Professional Development Day in October. The feedback received from coordinators about the content of the event and skill building opportunities indicated that we were successful in providing valuable and relevant information. The opportunity for coordinators to network with other coordinators in the province is a key element in the success of these events. The conference plenary session, "FGC within the context of ADR" and a workshop on "Safety during the FGC process" were filmed. A copy of the DVD will be available in January 2011.

Ontario Provincial Resource

Website Our website is visited on a daily basis and is used as a resource by coordinators and others involved with Family Group Conferencing/Family Group Decision Making. The site has been reorganized to make the information clearer and easier to access. A page on the site has been designated specifically for "FGC/FGDM Coordinator Resources", which includes articles, links, brochures and handouts from our Professional Development Days. If you are interested in sharing resources relevant to FGC/FGDM practice, please contact the Provincial Resource office.

Coordinator's Manual

Revisions to the manual are being made and will be presented to the Steering Committee for feedback. It is expected that the revisions will be completed in April 2011. The revised Manual will be launched at the 1st Canadian FGC/FGDM Conference in September 2011.

1st Canadian FGC/FGDM Conference Sept 25-27, 2011

Planning for the conference continues. A call for presentations has been sent out, with a due date for applications of February 15, 2011. For more information go to www.oacasgroups.org/uploads/fgdm.pdf

Carolina Pizarro,
Provincial Resource Staff

Additional Funding for FGC/FGDM With Youth

Youth Transitioning Project

Three years ago, a research study on the use of Family Group Conferencing with youth transitioning into adulthood (originally referred to as youth leaving care) was initiated. The purpose was to explore the unique factors in using FGC with this population and the implications for training FGC coordinators. Since FGC had rarely been used with this population, referrals were low and the study could not be completed.

To reduce some of the barriers, the Provincial Resource re-

directed resources to education and the promotion of using FGC with this population. The referral criteria were changed to include all youth over age 14, and a financial honorarium was offered to youth participating in the study. Some regions were not able to fund some youth referrals, seeing them as not strictly falling under ADR funding criteria, i.e. not seen as "protection" cases.

Additional Funding

To support the use of FGC with youth, the Ministry has provided additional funding, amounting to \$6,00 per region.

At a meeting with the regional ADR coordinators in October, the Provincial Resource invited each regional ADR/TP agency to administer the use of the fund in their respective regions. In two regions without a single ADR/TP agency (Hamilton/Niagara and Northeast), customized application procedures were put in place.

The funding is to be used to fund, wholly or partially, FGC/FGDM referrals of youth ages 14 and over involved with child welfare.

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FGC/FGDM With Youth Additional funding

The issue of transitioning into adulthood must be part of the referral questions.

The referral may or may not qualify as ADR.

As in all FGC referrals with youth, the expectation is that the youth and coordinators will be invited to participate in the Youth Transitioning Research Project. In accordance with research and service integrity, participation in the Research Project is voluntary and service funding will not be withheld for youth choosing not to participate.

For more information about the availability of this funding, contact your local ADR/TPA agency listed below:

ADR/TPA Agencies

Central West Region:

Associated Youth Services of Peel

South East Region:

Counselling Services of Belleville & District

Eastern Region:

Family Service a la famille Ottawa

Northern Region:

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

South West:

ADR LINK, London

North East Region:

Local Child Welfare Agency

Central East Region:

Blue Hills Child & Family Centre

Hamilton/Niagara Region:

Catholic Family Services of Hamilton, Brant Family Group Decision Making Program, and Family Counselling Centre Niagara

Toronto Region:

The George Hull Centre

Taking a Proactive Approach

I would like to talk about two cases that I found very rewarding over the past few months. The reason I found them so rewarding is that they were both cases that planned for the arrival of a child. It was very encouraging to see my local CAS taking a proactive approach to their concerns. It was also wonderful to see the families willingness to take the leap of faith needed in the Family Group Decision process (FGC/FGDM).

CAS's concerns in both cases were regarding the mental health of the mothers and their ability to care for their second child with their partners. The mothers were unable to care for their first child due to domestic violence, mental health and their young age.

CAS's perspective in both cases had changed as both mothers seemed to have matured and found more appropriate partners. The CAS worker on both cases felt it was important to engage the families in the process of Family Group Decision Making as she wanted to feel confident that the circumstances surrounding these families were different and that the parents were now in a position to parent their own children. The goal of CAS was to have these parents develop a strong support network from both their family and community as they were worried about the maintenance of the mental concerns and the parents' ability to develop and retain the skills needed to parent effectively.

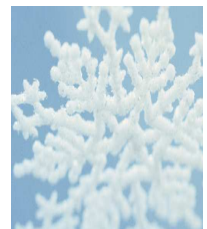
The families were very excited and determined to keep the children in their family circles, all members were actively involved from day one and therefore the preparation phases moved along very quickly. It was refreshing to see the level of commitment given by the families during the whole process.

Within the process the families were given the opportunity to utilize all their strengths and increase their family's unity and ability to succeed. Both families were able to develop a strong and workable plan, a plan that ensured the least intrusive measures by CAS, a plan where the parents would be able to care for their child when appropriate supports were put in place.

CAS is now looking at engaging with more families before the child is born as they were able to see the positive results in these two families. It is now the hope of the agency that with the assistance of FGC/FGDM process more families can become actively involved in developing strong working relationships and plans that support the prevention of children coming into care before their birth.

Marion Mitchell, FGDM Coordinator, Northern Region

"It was refreshing to see the level of commitment given by the families during the whole process"



International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, Dulwich Centre, Adelaide, Australia: **An Excerpt from an Interview with Daniel Bogue on Family Group Conferencing conducted by David Denborough of the Dulwich Centre**

David: *You've dedicated many years of your working life to family group conferencing; what's important to you about this practice?*

Daniel: That's an interesting question. First of all, I really got interested in the idea of family group conferencing. Whenever I get interested in something new or innovative, it's not just the actual specific activity, or technology, or 'intervention', or way of doing things that interests me. It's also what it represents. To me, family group conferencing represents a way of engaging with a number of broader societal concerns. First of all, one of the principles that family group conferencing is based on involves bringing back the notion of the extended family. It has an 'ancestral' kind of philosophy to it. It honours and involves multi-generational extended families. Over the last hundred years or so, western culture has placed a very high value on the idea of the nuclear family, and I think this has influenced family therapists. So much so, that if we want to refer to the extended family, we have to add in the word 'extended'! However, here in Toronto, we meet with many first and second generation immigrants who come from families which are not that distant historically from much more 'ancestral' ways of thinking. When you say 'family' to them, they automatically assume you're thinking of grandparents, uncles, cousins, and the community. The ways in which family group conferencing honours multi-generational extended families, and the possibilities this offers for developing culturally appropriate ways of working in multicultural Toronto, is significant to me. Secondly, family group conferencing is responding to a second trend that has also occurred over the last hundred years or so in western society. During this time, we have professionalised and sometimes even medicalised certain kinds of problems of living. Interpersonal problems of living that were once primarily responded to within 'natural kinship' groups – family, friends, community, neighbours – are increasingly

seen as the domain of professional intervention. Over time, resorting to professional intervention has almost taken preference over families resolving their own problems. What I love about family group conferencing is that it seeks to reverse this trend. It recognises how extended families can be assisted to resolve their own problems. It does this by creating a forum in which the diverse voices of family members are predominant. A plan is developed in that forum and, in this plan, the decisions are made by the family. The professionals work with the family – it's not that they're excluded; as a matter of fact, they're included in very significant ways. But they're included in a process that prioritises families resolving and responding to their own problems of living.

David: *Can you tell how the concept of 'private family time' fits in this process?*

Daniel: Private family time is a core component of Family Group Conferencing because it allows the family to truly take ownership and authorship of the plan that they develop together. When the conference gets to the point where it is time for the plan to be developed, the professionals leave the room. It's a little like the idea of caucusing. If you are a part of a group that is not entitled in a particular context, then meeting separately at times, and then coming together again later, is a way of developing a sense of entitlement as a group.

David: *Can you tell me more about the preparations that go into hosting a family group conference?*

Daniel: To prepare for a family group conference is like preparing for a family reunion. It's a significant event. The co-ordinators are given the time to contact every single person who's going to come, and they work out how it's going to happen. A lot of logistical planning has to happen. A family group conferencing co-ordinator is very committed in supporting the family, but also has to be like somebody who organizes a wedding. You have to be really good at working out details. In each of those

miniscule details, there are a million little opportunities to enhance the family members' sense of power and agency. I use the word 'enhance' to make it clear the worker is not at the centre of this process. We have to ensure the family is directing. If you're organising a wedding, then clearly you wouldn't organise anything unless the key people in the whole wedding party were on board with it. So it's essential that family members are involved in all those details, which includes what kind of food, arranging for people to be there for the kids, arranging for transportation, arranging what's the best time for which members of the family to come, and so on. By the time it happens, the family feels that it's really *their* meeting, rather than being called to go to a meeting at the agency. And that's also why all meetings don't happen at the child welfare agency. They happen where families want to be, so they tend to take place in community centres, church basements – places that the family feels is kind of a neutral place. Within the preparations, every opportunity is used to work towards a sense that the family is coming together to figure out what to do about their kids.

Denborough, David (2010). Reversing the trend: Families resolving and responding to their own problems of living through family group conferencing. An interview with Daniel Bogue. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, No. 1, 23-31.

For the complete interview please go to www.georgehullcentre.on.ca/documents/Daniel%20Bogue%20Interview.pdf

Or email Carolina Pizarro at cpizarro@georgehull.on.ca



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Upcoming Training

Next Professional Development Day

APRIL 2011

Next issue of the Newsletter

April 2011

If interested in submitting an article,
please contact Carolina Pizarro at
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THE GEORGE HULL CENTRE
for Children and Families

TIPS FOR CONNECTING WITH TEEN PARENTS

Learn to anticipate challenges or barriers early on: Ask the referring worker if there is a good time to call the parent, for example, how do they get a hold of them? Is there a pattern? Is there someone in the family that is always able to get a message to them?

Understand the Population: Learn about Adolescents (15 –19), teens have high stress, how are they managing relations with peers, parents, grandparents, each other? What are their protective factors?

Get the right foot in the door! Be sensitive, meet at a time that is good for them, find a convenient location, be a good listener. Keep in mind that youth may not like to communicate with adults, make it more meaningful, have a coffee with them while you talk and explore who will be their support.

Be prepared with the right tools: Be creative: cell phone, email, texting or letters. Help the teen parent to focus on the purpose of FGC. Be transparent with everyone, and build trust. Reassure the teen parent that FGC is an opportunity to have their voice heard. Make sure you stay connected with them so that they will follow through and attend FGC.

Working with the OCL: Consent, making the appointment to meet with the youth, the OCL and FGC coordinator, voice of the teen parent.

DON'T FORGET!

- 1) Connect with the teen parents through the child...ask about the child
- 2) Keep the discussion short, not like school
- 3) Use open-ended questions
- 4) Don't try to be a "teen" with them (you are not a teen)
- 5) They want to be respected
- 6) Don't assume anything...always ask

Maryann Kobzan-Diakow, FGC coordinator Hamilton/Niagara Region and
Marilee Sherry, FGDM Coordinator, CAS of Brant, Hamilton/Niagara Region