

Family Group Conferencing Toronto

Issue #10

The Family Group Conferencing Program enables at-risk children, youth and families to address safety concerns in a meaningful, empowering and culturally sensitive way. Offered to families with child welfare involvement, or who are seeking services at a children's mental health agency, FGC Toronto offers an alternative dispute resolution approach to problem-solving. Why is this so important? Because, a plan is much more likely to work, if the family has the opportunity to come up with it themselves!

Kim and her three children had an open case with Children's Aid for over five years. Kim had lived through many traumas, including several assaults by a violent partner, and the death of her youngest daughter as a result of the conflict in the home. Meanwhile, her children had developed mental health concerns, and trauma as a result of their experiences. Kim began to do better, she started over with her daughters in a new home, and remained determined to raise her daughters in a safer, healthier environment. When it came time for her file at Children's Aid to close, Kim's workers worried about how she would manage without the professional support in her life, and were worried that Kim would relapse and the children would have to go back into foster care.

Thankfully, her family service worker had access to The FGC Toronto Program, who arranged a referral immediately in Kim's community with a trained coordinator. Kim worried about her lack of family and social supports as a result of leaving her community to find safety. By connecting with Kim, the coordinator was able to brainstorm possible supportive people, connect with extended family and friends, and facilitate the conference day with a large network of personal and professional support. The support network presented a concrete plan for how to address the safety concerns, and how they would help

keep Kim and the girls safe. Feeling more assured, Children's Aid was able to close the file, and definitively share with the family how proud they were of all the progress they had made together.

Today, Kim and her daughters are doing wonderfully! Their file has remained closed with Children's Aid, and they continue to flourish with the loving support of family, friends, and supportive professionals.

It is by ensuring that families feel empowered, and have the capacity to problem solve, that we can observe sustainable, and family focused care in its truest form.

