

## **One Minute Guide: Family Group Conferencing**

### **What is it?**

A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child who is deemed to be in a serious situation or at risk where a plan or decision needs to be made for that child/young person. It is a voluntary process and families cannot be forced to have a family group conference. It was originally founded in New Zealand over 20 years ago and was introduced into the UK in 1998.

### **What are the aims of the Family Group Conference (FGC)?**

The overall objective of the family group conference is to support families in finding solutions to their own problems. The family becomes the decision maker and the professionals provide the information and resources to assist the development of a Family Plan. The aims are:

- to help support families care for their children;
- to reduce the number of children needing to be accommodated by the local authority by assisting families to look for solutions or alternatives;
- to reduce the number of children subject to proceedings by engaging with the whole family and friend's network for the child; and
- to support the return of children from care to their families.

### **How does it work?**

Families, the child/young person, extended family members and on occasion identified friends, are assisted by an independent family group conference coordinator to prepare for the meeting. The role of the family group conference coordinator involves prior to the conference taking place, speaking with the individual attendee's, the child/young person and the social worker whom represents the local authority's view of the child's needs and concerns that need to be addressed.

### **The Family Group Conference (FGC) Model – What is the process in the London Borough of Redbridge?**

- **Referral**  
Social Worker/professional makes a referral for a FGC with agreement by the relevant Team Manager. The referral once confirmed is then allocated to a FGC Coordinator.
- **Preparation**  
The FGC coordinator makes contact with the social worker/professional and identified family members. This is to gain an understanding to the situation, discuss the concerns and desired outcomes and answer any questions and, to prepare all parties for the meeting.

- **At the Conference**

The Conference is divided into three parts. The first is information giving. The social worker or professional will attend this part of the meeting to discuss local authority concerns for the child/young person. The second part is private family time at which point the social worker/professional will leave the meeting. The family, with the help of the Co-ordinator, if needed, will formulate a plan for the child – known as the Family Plan. The Family Plan is then presented and agreed by the Conference. The Plan is then circulated to all working with the family and implementation begins. If required, a review of the Family Plan can take place in the format of a FGC.

### **How can I access the Family Group Conference Service?**

There is a referral form to access this service which is available from your Team Manager. The form needs to be completed and agreed with the referring professional's / Social Worker's manager and then emailed to the [Service Manager](#), Community Social Work Service.

The family with whom the FGC is being undertaken must be advised of and in agreement with the FGC to go ahead.

The family lead i.e. mother/father/carer will need to provide the social worker/professional with details of all interested parties whom will be attending the conference that can offer support to the plan.

Once, the referral is received by the Service Manager this is then passed to an independent FGC Coordinator to be appointed whom, will then contact the social worker/professional and family members directly for introductions and arranging of the meeting.

### **Feedback and Review of the service**

Following the FGC Meeting there are two evaluation forms, provided by the FGC Co-ordinator, to be completed by the family/friends that are present and by the Social Worker or other professional. These should then be sent to the [Service Manager](#) in the Community Social Work Service who oversees and monitors the service. Any feedback or concerns should also be e-mailed to the [Service Manager](#).

### **How can I find out more about FGCs?**

There are a number of useful sources which provide more detailed information on FGCs:

- Barnardo's [Family Group Conferences - Principles and Practice Guidance](#);
- Family Rights Group [Information on Family Group Conferences](#);
- Community Care article [The role of Family Group Conferences in preventing the need for care proceedings](#); and
- Guardian Social Care Network article [Family Group Conferences - the power to change lives](#).