

Family Conferencing in the Community Network

26 April 2006

CPS, 70 Altona Street, Heidelberg West

Attendees:

CPS: Nigel Polak (convenor & project support), Bernadette Burchell (CEO), Marianne Mahony (Community Liaison Coordinator).

Glastonbury Family Services: Marg Brittain (Snr Convenor), Tiffany Godfrey (Family Services Manager), Debbie Moore (Convenor).

Anglicare: Marg Kearsley (Director), Michelle Mealor (Project Coordinator)

Consultants: Paul Ban (Consultant Convenor) (**Chair**), Margaret Armstrong (Consultant Convenor – Education)

Apologies:

DHS: Pru Blackmore (DHS AFDM Convenor)(currently on long service leave), Lesley Harding (DHS FDM Convenor and Trainer)

Australian Childhood Foundation: Marina Dickson (Training Manager).

1. Introduction and reason for attending

Brief introductions. Outlined VARP and intentions. Purpose to advance agency practice and combine thinking and ideas. Brief chat about venue given distances between Geelong (Glastonbury) and Lilydale (Anglicare).

Nigel Polak: History in Restorative Justice in the UK. Interest in Family Group Conferencing. Prepared training needs analysis for CPS and seeking views on best practice.

Marianne Mahoney (CPS): Role as community liaison coordinator responsible for coordinating CPS engagement and involvement in Family Conferencing. Looking to schools as desirable service. Trust funding to train staff.

Marg Kearsley (Anglicare):

- Trained in FGC with Paul Ban.
- At Melbourne City Mission used Family Group Conferencing for placing adolescents.
- Aware of active program in Gippsland.
- Recent Innovations funding won by Anglicare – key question: how do we reduce notifications? FGC potential response.
- Michelle working on foster care options for family services.

(Margaret Armstrong: Strong training is a real key.

Paul Ban: history shows that FGC worked in DHS if convenor's supported by managers.)

Marg Brittain (Glastonbury):

- 11+ years of Family Group Decision Making at Glastonbury Family Services as a response to the high number of kids in care.
- currently a self-funding program. i.e. Separate to DHS funding.

- Originally funded by DHS, with 80–90% of referrals from DHS.
- Later, funded by Strengthening Families brokerage. Eventually these referrals dried up.
- In 2003 decision was made to offer no fee for service, leading to 43 referrals in the first year.
- Conferences mostly about planning custody and access of children. Promoted as “decision making process for a child”.
- Referrals are from: agencies, intake, schools. Increasingly referrals are Family Court Matters that don’t / can’t go to court.
- Each year the program undertakes an annual review and targets any gaps identified in service provision.
- *Costs: \$57 plus for convenor 20 – 50hours*

Tiffany Godfrey: GFS Acting Program Manager (6 months), directly supervising Marg and Debbie.

Debbie Moore: 0.5 Convenor. Currently in mentoring phase with Marg Brittain.

Margaret Armstrong: Conferencing in schools. More about behaviour management, than family decision making. Interest in a community-wide approach. i.e. moving approach beyond schools into the community.

2. Purpose of the Group

Marg Brittain:

- Aim is to develop a network of community based Family Group Conferencing Convenors in Victoria to get a Victorian perspective on who is working where and what they are doing.
- To reduce the isolation of community convenors.
- To raise the profile of community Family Group Conferencing within VARJ as restorative practice with families / restoring relationships and connectedness in families.
- Forum for discussing practice of Family Group Conferencing.
- Forum for discussing issues that arise for Family Group Conferencing
- Mentoring for new Family Group Conferencing convenors.
- Promoting of Family Group Conferencing in the community
- Identifying the training needs for new convenors and ongoing training.
- Family Group Conferencing documentation
- Funding submissions to extend Family Group Conferencing in the community agencies.

Marg Kearsley:

- Best Practice training and practice.
- Group power in funding seeking.
- Flexibility in practice.
- Be innovative.

Marianne Mahoney:

1. CPS Mission: Working with vulnerable children and families. What can we do to support these children?
2. We have money to go ahead with training staff in FGC process and to conduct 12 conferences. (Nelken Trust and how the funding works i.e. develop training, train convenors, 12 conferences. CPS is flexible on how this will look.)
3. Positioning Family Service teams in areas of greatest need. Making community connections.

3. Discussion about Training and Models

There is a purist model of practice that is well known and evaluated.

4. Distinctions between government (DHS) and non-government/community sector uses of Family Conferencing

DHS v's Community models:

Paul Ban: There is a need for a sense of urgency for a conference to work. DHS is a crisis in itself. In the community sector there is a need for the family to identify the crisis that is occurring for them. It is a stressful process and the families need to see it as worthwhile. Question to ask: if you didn't hold a family conference, what would happen?

Bernadette Burchell arrives – Introductions and summary by Paul Ban. Described vision for CPS of training all staff in skills of Family Conference convening.

Paul Ban: Referred to previous discussion and supported that this may not get off the ground because this model hasn't worked anywhere else. Favoured model that works, is individuals whose focus is Family Conferencing. This enables focus on practise, promotion, development and community education by a group of committed individuals.

5. Best practice service delivery and training in the non-government sector

General indication of ongoing success of Glastonbury Family Services' model.

Marg Britain: Advocate for model of sole convenor because of the way of thinking that goes along with doing this work.

6. Options for Training and project development in the non-government sector

Trainers: Paul Ban } 3 days
 Leslie Harding } 3 days

Mentors: Paul Ban
Margaret Britain

7. Identifying and evaluating referral sources in the non-government sector – importance of educating intake

Marg Britain: stressed the importance of a targeted community education approach in order to build up referrals. GFS are expanding to meet referral demand.

8. Project Evaluation

Marg Britain: Glastonbury Family Services have done evaluation – currently being reviewed – will distribute when made public.

9. Where to from here?

Marg Kearsley: Meet in one month to put more form onto ideas.

Paul Ban: Invitation to also go to:

- Melbourne City Mission,
- Australian Childhood Foundation and
- DHS.

Next Meeting:

2.00pm - 4.30pm

14th June 2006

Anglicare Training Room

12 Batman Street

West Melbourne – nearest Station: Flagstaff

