

Family Conferencing in the Community Network

14 June 2006

Anglicare Training Room, West Melbourne

Attendees:

Consultants: Paul Ban (Consultant Convenor) (**Chair**), Margaret Armstrong (Consultant Convenor and Dept Education & Training), Lesley Harding (Consultant Convenor and Dept Human Services North and West)

Glastonbury Child & Family Services: Marg Brittain (Snr Convenor), Debbie Moore (Convenor)

Melb City Mission: Mandy Baxter, Shauna Lenagh, Yasmin Thomas, Angela Dupuche, Raneé Cornell

Anglicare: Marg Kearsley (Director, Yarra)

Ringwood FRC: Ian Goodhardt (Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner), Nigel Polak (Family Relationship Adviser)

Apologies: nil

Agenda:

1. Introduction and reason for attending
2. FGC as a pure/flexible model of practice: the Burnside model - Paul Ban
3. Clearer objectives for the group – Lesley Harding
4. Amendment to minutes – Marg Brittain
5. Next meeting

1. Introduction and reason for attending

Melbourne City Mission, Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program, and Re-Connect Project (Mandy Baxter):

- Commitment to holistic approach to services for homeless youth
- Currently utilising mediation between adolescents and their families
- Are building a database of referral points for homeless youth, i.e. counsellors, mediators, etc (no FGC convenors as yet)
- Extensive brokerage available
- Information packs refer to “family conferencing” and are here to learn more – i.e. is this an approach that is going to work for homeless youth?

Anglicare Yarra Valley (Marg Kearsley) (repeat):

- Trained in FGC with Paul Ban.
- At Melbourne City Mission used Family Group Conferencing for placing adolescents.
- Recent Innovations funding won by Anglicare – key question: how do we reduce notifications? FGC potential response through brokerage funding for training and convenors.

Glastonbury CFS (Marg Brittain) (repeat):

- 11+ years of Family Group Decision Making at Glastonbury Family Services as a response to the high number of kids in care. Was DHS funded, now self funding.
- “pure” model of family group conferencing broken into 4x levels, 1-3 of which are prior to holding a conference.

Margaret Armstrong (Consultant & DET) (repeat): trains convenors and convenes 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.

Lesley Harding (Consultant / DHS Child Protection):

- Convenor for DHS in child protection matters.
- Significant experience as trainer.
- Interested in continuing to develop practice of FGC in Victoria.

Family Relationship Centre, Ringwood (Ian Goodhardt):

- Amendments to Family Law Act:
 - Presumption of child spending equal or substantial and significant time with each parent;
 - Free national advice line.
- 15 centres to open nationally on 3 July 2006, 65 by mid- 2008
- 4 in Victoria: Ringwood, Frankston, Sunshine, and Mildura
- FRC’s aim to:
 - keep families in conflict out of the Family Court: i.e.
 - keep families together; and, if not possible,
 - minimise ongoing conflict of separation.
 - provide information, advice and family dispute resolution;
 - resolve issues with only one outside referral.
- Here exploring potential for FGC as a model of “family dispute resolution”, particularly for kinship-based communities and extended family relationships.

2. FGC as a model of practice

Paul Ban: noted that there was a theme of “purity” around practice in the last meeting. Today’s theme is likely to refocus on “flexibility” around practice, such as the Glastonbury CFS 4x level model.

Lesley Harding: use of “model” in child protection context emphasises preparatory discussions with all relevant individuals to:

1. inform them about the issues of concern; and
2. discover their stance on the issue.

Noted that if process is rushed by (e.g.) Court pressures then convenor has less contact with participants. This leads to a lower success rate (anecdotally) due to less connection between convenor and participants.

Action: at least one key article on FGC to be distributed with these minutes.

Paul Ban: on Burnside Child & Family Services, NSW:

- Large agency of 400+ employees
- Key contact: Patricia Kylie
- Patricia has trained ALL Burnside staff as FGC convenors to run conferences on occasion with their own and other clients.
- Patricia offers a 4 day training offered as a Certificate course that counts as a credit to a University diploma (not clear in what)
- Proposed that network share funding to bring Patricia to Melb to present.

Action: ALL to discuss interest in a presentation in Melb by Patricia amongst networks and discuss at next meeting.

3. Amendment to Minutes of 26/04/06:

Marg Brittain: comment attributed to Paul Ban "DHS is a crisis in itself" could be misconstrued.

Paul Ban: comment better stated in minutes as:

"Simply being involved with DHS can for clients be construed as a crisis in itself."

Action: minutes of 26/04/06 to be amended as above.

4. Purpose of the Group

Marg Brittain (repeat):

- 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 (from 26/04/06):

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

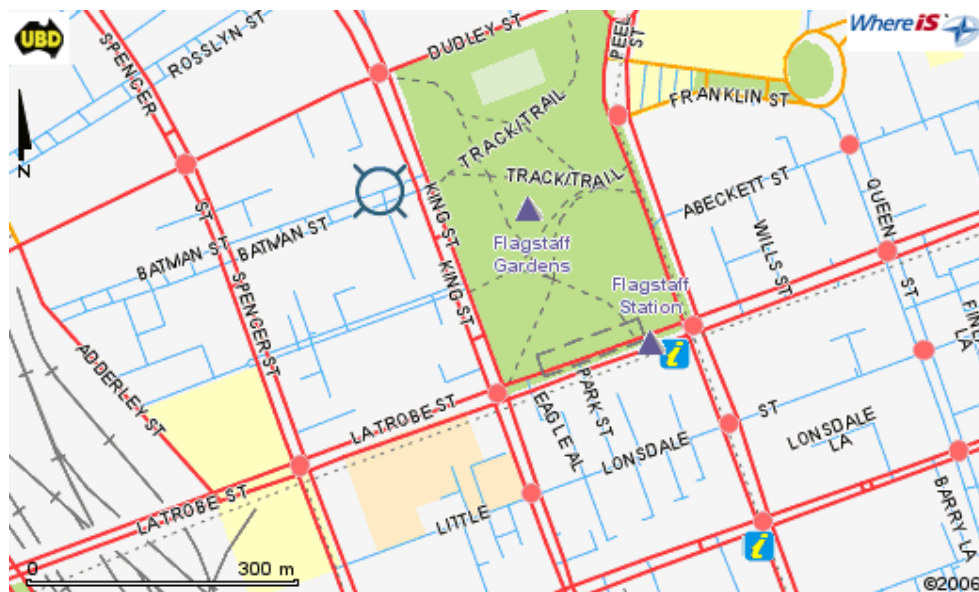
- Flexibility in practice.
- Be innovative.

Agreed objectives:

1. Network and support for existing and developing practitioners
2. Promotion of FGC as an approach amongst providers and users
3. Development/refinement of practice and training approaches

Next Meeting:

2.00pm - 4.30pm
 9th August 2006
 Anglicare Training Room
 12 Batman Street
 West Melbourne – nearest Station: Flagstaff



Agenda:

1. How will FGC work in various fields? (E.g. youth homelessness, family breakdown, impact of family violence on participation)
2. Clearly define group membership (i.e. impact of new members)
3. Responsibility for minutes
4. Arrangements for presentation by Patricia Kylie