

Family Group Conferencing Network
Wednesday 7th February 2007
2:00 – 3:30 pm
Venue: Melbourne Citymission 19 King Street Melbourne

FGC Network Minutes

1. Attendance

Margaret Brittain: Glastonbury Family Services (GFS), Nigel Polak: Ringwood Family Relationship Centre (RFRC), Paul Ban: Private practitioner/consultant; Mandy Baxter: Melbourne City Mission (MCM); Dom Swift: Department of Human Services Child Protection (DHS CP); Yasmin Thomas: MCM; Judith Newbold: Regional Extended Family Services (REFS)

Chair: Paul Ban

Minutes: Nigel Polak

2. Apologies

Lesley Harding: DHS / private consultant; Eddy DeNardis: DHS CP; Margaret Kearsley: Anglicare (Eastern); Ian Goodhardt: RFRC; Margaret Armstrong; educational consultant; Michelle Myers: private practitioner; Michelle Mealar: Anglicare (Eastern); Debbie Moore: Glastonbury Family Services

3. Business Arising

3.1 New members

Judith Newbold: REFS: Australia wide, based in Eastern region (Ringwood). Service arm and training arm. Developer of specialized model co-mediation for parent/adolescent conflict with adult/adolescent mediators matched for age with parent and adolescent. REFS Key Objective: building community capacity. FGC is a good fit for this objective. Current training programs in Certificate IV in Community Mediation. RTO for Vocational Diploma in Family Dispute Resolution, accreditation coinciding with changes to Family Law. Strong links with indigenous mediation programs.

Dom noted existing DHS CP Aboriginal FGDM models, incorporating partnership with Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency (VACA).

Mandy noted existing contract with between MCM and REFS to look into resolving issues with youth homelessness.

Nigel noted that REFS is a member of the management consortium / steering group for RFRC.

FGC link? REFS as training provider, initially anticipating FDR accreditation to include FGC - in most recent draft does not (see 4.2 and 4.3 below).

Marg noted the fit between FGC training being arranged by Network and REFS expertise in marketing & managing training programs.

At the close of the meeting Judith indicated her intention to continue to attend Network meetings.

3.2 VARJ

Mandy confirmed that MCM is a member of VARJ.

3.3 DHS Update

Dom reported that DHS CP (in the North and West Metropolitan Region) has a strong commitment to Family Group Decision Making (FDM). Currently the FDM team comprises of 5EFTs which includes 3.5EFT FGC Convenors and 1.5EFT Aboriginal Family Decision Making Convenors. Additionally there is a .5EFT FDM Co-Ordinator to manage the team. FGDMs are experiencing high demand for services, particularly in relation to the regions operational guidelines and mandatory points for FDM consultations. There are a large number of adolescents being referred. The actual and potential uses for FGC in the DHS CP context were discussed.

3.4 Children's Court

Paul advised that DHS CP is seeking a more participatory approach from families and seeking to move way from the adversarial approach that tends to dominate the Children's Court. Paul and others will be supporting an approach modeled on FGC approaches.

3.5 MCM & GFS co-working!

Mandy & Marg were pleased to report that they both coincidentally coordinated meetings between GFS and BYAS (Barwon Youth Accommodation Service) a SAAP funded service, to discuss delivery of FGCs by GFS funded by FRMP brokerage per conference. The meeting resulted in a memorandum of understanding between GFS and BYAS. When a 15-17 year old presents to BYAS the youth worker will identify the potential for support from extended family. The family will be referred to GFS to explore the possibility of an FGC with the purpose of identifying alternative family accommodation for the young person while other youth homelessness related work is being performed by the BYAS youth worker.

3.6 FGC Professional Development Forum to youth homelessness sector

Mandy advised that MCM intends to host a professional development forum on FGC as a model for the youth homelessness sector. BYAS and GFS have been invited to participate in the forum.

5. Standing items

4.1 Resources Pertaining to FGC

None tabled. MCM is working on and will make available to Network material relating to the Supported & Assisted Accommodation Program for young people at risk of homelessness (Mandy).

Action: **The network to bring to the next meeting resources pertaining to Family Group Conferencing. E.g. training opportunities, examples of how FGC models are used within different settings etc.**

4.2 FDR Practitioner Accreditation

Documents were tabled by Nigel at the last meeting pertaining to competencies proposed for elective units (developed by the CSHISC www.cshisc.org.au) to accredit Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners (FDRPs) under the changing system of Family Law. It is proposed that FDRPs will become accredited to practice upon completion of an Advanced Vocational Diploma in FDR.

Paul noted that FGC no longer appeared as an elective in the final draft of the accreditation framework. Judith, at Nigel's request, made contact with Gabrielle Paslow-Tidy, educational consultant responsible for the framework to clarify the reasons for the removal. CSHISC had received feedback that there were too many electives available for the accreditation, and FGC had been removed on the basis that it was an intervention primarily targeting child protection cases.

The Network disagreed with this analysis and proposed that FGC can be tailored to the circumstances in which a family presents itself, rather than being limited to the systemic context of that presentation. Judith advised that there will be a review process that the Network might feed into.

Action: **Network to submit a (joint) response (with VARJ) objecting to the removal of FGC from the elective options and giving reasons for its inclusion in future frameworks.**

Judith advised that REFS has been approved as a trainer of this accreditation. REFS currently offer just one of the proposed core subjects: *Operating in a Family Law Context*.

4.3 FGC Training

Marg distributed information pertaining to FGC training offered by Patricia Kiely under the auspices of Burnside (Family Services) Training. The training is a nationally accredited elective unit of the Advanced Diploma of Systemic therapy. Approx cost per participant of 4-day training is \$500.

Action: **Marg to speak with Patricia Kiely concerning accreditation of participants and knowledge of circumstances surrounding FDRP accreditation framework.**

Action: **Judith to speak with Gabrielle Paslow-Tidy concerning options for inclusion in accreditation framework and review process.**

Action: **Marg & Judith to confer re joint working of respective organizations to facilitate training.**

Action: **Network to confirm level of interest in training within respective organizations by next meeting.**

Action: **Network to aim for training to be provided in June 2007.**

4.4 Meetings

Nigel advised that Ian had requested that meetings be moved to another day as they conflict with RFRC meetings. Nigel advised that this had since been discussed with the RFRC manager and an attempt would be made to not conflict with meetings.

It was agreed that meetings would continue to precede VARJ Committee meetings to accommodate Marg, Paul and Nigel who are on the VARJ Committee.

Action: **Nigel to request that VARJ meetings be scheduled in advance to facilitate planning Network meetings. (SEE BELOW)**

**Next meeting: Wednesday, 14th March 2007
 2.00-3.30pm
 Melbourne City Mission, 19 King Street, Melbourne CBD**

**Proposed Meetings: Wednesday 26th April, 2.00-3.30pm
 Wednesday 23rd May, 2.00-3.30pm
 Wednesday 20th June, 2.00-3.30pm
 Wednesday 18th July, 2.00-3.30pm
 Wednesday 15th August, 2.00-3.30pm
 Wednesday 12th September, 2.00-3.30pm**

Proposed items for future discussion:

- **promotion of FGC in Victoria**
- **neutrality in FGC (e.g. vs Mediation)**
- **where does the convenor role best sit: legal/community/welfare/families?**