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Family Group Conferencing Ontario Provincial Resource

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PROVINCIAL RESOURCE UPDATE



The Spring/Summer was hectic in terms of some of the activities we embarked on. The Ontario Provincial Resource put together an admissions committee along with a formal process for conducting interviews with mentors and trainers. The committee had the opportunity to interview two prospective mentors. We welcome Todd Perrault from South East Region and Rosenda Brown from the Toronto region to the Roster of FGC mentors!

Furthermore, as part of our goal to create awareness on the use of FGC with youth transitioning into adulthood, we met with

YouthCAN through the OACAS to discuss partnership in assisting youth to access the services they need. We were successful in identifying a common philosophy and the areas in which we could work together. Subsequently we were invited to participate in a poster session organized by YouthCAN in which we had the opportunity to meet some youth. We learned that in order to make FGC accessible to youth, we need to develop promotional materials that are "youth friendly". But most of all, we need to ensure that in our message, youth are clear that FGC is a youth-driven process that supports youth in connecting

with family and their community. Our plan is to have a brochure available for youth in January 2010.

This summer, the Provincial Roster was reorganized. The coordinators are now grouped regionally, alphabetically, by languages and those working with First Nations/Aboriginal communities. The Roster of mentors and trainers has also been grouped regionally. We plan to continue to do work to our website to make it more of a virtual information and communication tool to the FGC community and the public at large.

Carolina Pizarro,
Provincial Resource Staff

YOUTH TRANSITIONING INTO ADULTHOOD

We know from research that youth who have been in care for extended periods of time often have very disrupted family ties and lack of support from core family or contact with extended kin.

Research has shown that youth transitioning into adulthood without permanent family and community connections face a high likelihood of many negative outcomes including housing instability, homelessness or transience, low (minimal or inadequate) education, dependence on income assistance, mental health issues, and involvement in criminal activities.

Family group conferencing offers youth an alternative approach and it can improve planning, ease youth transitioning into adulthood, widen a youth's network of supports, decrease anxiety about impending exits, establish or renew connections with extended family members and foster creative problem solving.

Youth support the use of FGC. For example, at the 2009 FGDM Conference sponsored by the American Humane Association (AHA) in Pittsburg, youth said that FGC puts them in charge of their life and future and looks at what matters to them. Youth

wanted to attend including non-family. Without FGC youth said they would be much worse off:

I'd still be on the street thinking no one cared!"

Carolina and I recently met some youth at the YouthCAN poster session where we were offering brochures and information about FGC to youth participants. The first youth who approached us said it all: "where was FGC 3 years ago when I lost contact with my family. It's about time the youth's voices are put first".

Darlene Sykes,
FGDM Coordinator

FGDM in the Waterloo Region

The FGDM program in the Waterloo Region is unique in Ontario. The program has been developed and administered through Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) in Kitchener beginning in March 2007. The founder of CJI Mark Yantzi first brought forward the principles of restorative justice in 1974 after youths in Elmira vandalized numerous homes, vehicles and businesses. Rather than have the youths go through the legal system, Mark decided to have the youths meet with the persons they harmed. Since that time CJI has been a world leader in restorative justice programming.

There is a natural fit between the

values and principles of FGDM and restorative justice. Restorative justice speaks of inclusion, dignity, respect, repairing the harm between individuals and communities. CJI strives to build a safer, more connected community through supporting creative, peaceful solutions in situations of conflict or harm.

Working in partnership with the Waterloo F&CS offices, the FGDM program has been very successful. CJI is currently looking to expand the role of FGDM outside of realm of child protection matters. We are in the initial stages of expanding the concept of FGDM into other services in the community.

The concept of having a central location for FGDM is based on organizations in the United States. The overall goal would be that any family involved in services such as child and youth mental health, elder services, probation and corrections etc could request an FGDM conference through CJI.

Many of the programs at CJI i.e. Stride, Resolve and Revive already use a circle process or facilitated dialogue. FGDM would be a natural extension of the already existing service.

**Todd Perreault,
Community Justice Initiatives,
Waterloo**



The Craft of Writing Bottom Lines

It doesn't matter if you have written bottom lines a hundred times or just five times, it is always a challenge and the wording needs to change to reflect the situation at hand. The crafting of the bottom lines is essential to FGC process as it underpins all of the work to come. Here are some of my thoughts on the craft of writing bottom lines.

1. Who is the author? The bottom lines are usually formulated, in a draft version either on paper or in thought by the referring worker, prior to the initial meeting between the CAS and the FGC/FGDM coordinator. It is the task of the coordinator to review those bottom lines, explore them further and get general agreement about the wording of those bottom lines. The skilled coordinator ensures that the CAS remains the author of those bottom lines. The coordinator may take those rough notes

and polish them up before the final version is sent to the CAS for final approval, but the gist of them does not change from that initial meeting. It is the practice in our office to have two other pair of eyes take a look at the crafted bottom lines before they are sent to the CAS for final approval. It is standard practice that the bottom lines once approved by CAS and shared with the family are not to be revised (only under very exceptional circumstances).

2. How to ensure that the bottom lines are described and not prescribed? The bottom lines have to be worded to leave room for the families to make decisions and plans; after all, this is the purpose of bringing people together. They must be clear and not open to interpretation. Simple straight forward language is often best. Long laundry lists which look like a service plan should not be the

end result. In our office, it is our practice to manage the prescribed information such as 'any proposed caregivers will be involved in standard CAS assessment procedures' by putting it under a separate heading termed, 'Additional Information' which goes below the Bottom Lines.

3. What do you call bottom lines?

The term "bottom line" often gets batted around. On the pro side, it is argued that everyone understands the concept of 'bottom line', on the con side, it is argued that the term is too authoritarian. In our office, our practice depending on the situation is to use the term "Framework for Planning", or Guidelines for Planning' if the situation warrants it but otherwise to use the term 'Bottom Lines'.

**Louise Vandebosch ,
FGDM Coordinator, Community
Services Coordination Network**

**“How to
ensure that
the bottom
lines are
described and
not
prescribed”**



Central East Region – ADR Service

The CER-ADR Service is one year old having “officially” opened its doors in September 2008. The service hosted with Blue Hills Child and Family Centre, works collaboratively with the five CAS’s in CER which include Durham, Kawartha-Haliburton, Northumberland, Simcoe and York. A Steering Committee was initiated in April 2008 with representation from each CAS, Blue Hills Child and Family Centre and MCYS . At that time each of the five CAS’s in Central East Region was at a different developmental stage in their experience and use of ADR. The CER ADR Service delivery model was thoughtfully developed in partnership with each CAS and respectful of local history and relationships. The way it works is that a CAS worker can call the ADR coordinator (situated at Blue Hills Child and Family Centre) to make a referral to FGC/FGDM. The coordinator facilitates the match of FGC/FGDM facilitator to best deliver the service. Simcoe CAS has a slightly different process in that they have an internal FGDM facilitator who is responsible for screening referrals and facilitating the conferences.

Since the inception of the service, the receptiveness of the CAS’s has been positive. In the 2008-09 fiscal year CER ADR Service had 56 referrals to FGC/FGDM and referrals continue to grow. Each of the 5 CAS’s has assigned at least one “internal lead” who acts as their ADR “Champion.” These leads meet regularly with the ADR coordinator and consult with each other on decisions relating to the service. Part of the role of this group includes developing and implementing in service training to their own CAS’s based on their unique requirements.

With the help of the “internal leads” we are currently developing a method of tracking outcomes of the service that is looking at several factors including:

- The reduction of court costs and court time
- Impact on long term placements, and
- Positive outcomes for children.

We are very excited to work together on the development of this important second phase of service integration. We currently have 10 FGC /FGDM facilitators working in CER and one in training. The CER ADR coordinator works closely with all of the facilitators and has regular roster meeting allowing for an opportunity to discuss program and practice issues and offers opportunity for peer consultation. The service has hired an experienced FGC/FGDM mentor who is also available for consultation when coordinators are struggling with a case.

FGC/FGDM is alive and well in CER and we continue to educate and encourage all our CAS’s to consider it as a positive intervention for families.

**Alison McKelvey, ADR Coordinator,
Blue Hills Child and Family Centre**

Quotes about FGDM from the North

“It gave me the courage to accept the plan which best fits the needs of me and my baby. I am going to carry that courage for life”.
(Family Participant)

“The helpful thing that I found was that everything was explained before the circle got started”.
(Family Participant)

“I was a school principal for 34 years and I used it successfully in my school. It should be more widely used by many organizations. It strengthens families”.
(Family Participant)

“Everyone was able to be open in how they felt. Everyone respected one another and a lot was accomplished. (Family Participant)

“It helped us discuss the situation and our family dynamics in a respectful and purposeful way” (Family Participant)

“I think the whole process was valuable, enriching and empowering for the family.” (Service Provider)



FGDM in Sudbury



FGC Ontario Provincial Resource

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Visit our website for an electronic-copy of this issue at
www.georgehullcentre.on.ca/FGCPR

Upcoming Training

FGC Training - Basic and Advanced,

OTTAWA

English - Oct 29 and 30

French - Nov 9 and 10

To register, please contact Phyllis O'Neil at:
poneil@familyservicesottawa.org or
613-725-3601 Ext 221

Next Professional Development Day

APRIL 2010



THE GEORGE HULL CENTRE
for Children and Families

FGC For A Special Little Girl

A two year old child was living with her maternal grandmother, because her parents were not able to care for her, due to their own particular life challenges. Fortunately, the maternal grandmother was able to be the primary caregiver with the support of her extended family. After some time the maternal grandmother developed health problems, which caused the CAS to consider Family Group Conferencing (FGC).

Even though the parents were unable to attend, fortunately both the maternal and paternal extended family members embraced the opportunity to come together to discuss what would be in the best interest of the child. During the conference information was shared, letters were read and a few tears were wiped away during private

family time. After a lengthy discussion, the family came up with a plan that gradually moved the care of the child from the maternal grandmother to a paternal family member. The plan ensured that the child would continue to maintain a relationship with her maternal aunts, uncles and cousins.

The eleven family members had not had much contact with one another in the past however they were able to work together cooperatively and develop a plan that addressed the child's well being and future safety. Everyone left the FGC knowing they had worked hard in creating the best plan possible for her!

Maryann Kobzan-Diakow,
FGC Coordinator,
Family Counselling Centre Niagara



Our next issue of the Ontario
Provincial Resource Newsletter will be
available online in January 2010

If you would like to submit an article for
our Winter issue, please contact:

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