



**IN FONDACIJA**

FONDACIJA ZA UNAPREĐENJE SOCIJALNE  
INKLUZIJE DJECE I MLADIH U BIH

**FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE  
IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA  
2017**

**IN FOUNDATION**

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- ❖ **The national FGC network intervision meeting** was also additionally organised with the second generation of granted local partners-CSOs due to the finalization of their three-year project support by IN Foundation which ends in the last quarter of 2017. It provided a good opportunity to jointly analyse and identify opportunities and challenges in three years project implementation in the targeted communities. Discussion also drew attention to the possibility of achieving sustainability for the model implementation in work with children, young people and families at risk in targeted communities. The main conclusions which were reached after thorough examination clarify that model provides variety of options for different targeted groups, it could be easily integrated as a component of other projects and there is a perspective of the development of model through schools, juvenile justice and fostering care. Accordingly, partner CSOs express their interests to work together in order to seek other funding and donors' opportunities for the FGC model in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- ❖ **Two separate meetings were held with the UNICEF representatives** in order to discuss the FGC opportunities within the child protection system, education and juvenile justice. Since the UNICEF is being in the process of developing its strategic plan by 2020 for BiH, they are in the stage of mapping all potential resources and models across the country. An additional meeting organised with the representative of the Ombudsman for children in order to introduce her with the FGC initiatives and among other things, we presented potentials of FGC model for school professionals- as a model of early intervention and prevention for the educational system.

*As the FGCs model has been developing in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2011, a great number of family conferences have been organised. Although, the model has been developing primarily through the cooperation with the local social welfare centres and civil society organisations in order to innovate in the field of child protection in BiH, it has also been shown that this model could be easily applied within the education, health and justice sectors in BiH.*



**Country report 2017 - EU FGC Network:  
The Netherlands**



***Focus on compulsory situations***

In the Netherlands the social welfare system has changed a lot over the last few years. Local communities became responsible for three areas (child and youth care, work and care for chronic ill people and elderly) that before were the responsibility of the regional and national government. At the same time the Law of Child Welfare and the Law of Social Care changed. Dutch citizens have a legal right to make their own plan, in the Law of Child Welfare it is called a Family Group plan.

Both changes resulted in professionals being very busy with this new way of working and being less open to refer their clients to us for a Family Group Conference. The positive change is that for professionals it has become more normal to involve family members and to make plans together. There is a lot of attention for networks and for the strenghts of families. Professionals give people the possibility to make a plan. But professionals don't have a lot of time for preparation of circles and there is not a lot of attention for leaving families in control of their own lives. So what we see is that professionals can facilitate families in making their own plan, in voluntary situations. But in compulsory situations a Family Group Conference with an independent coordinator is needed.

In the Netherlands the Eigen Kracht Centrale trains professionals to make circles in voluntary situations and offers Family Group Conferences (Eigen Kracht-conferenties) done by independent coordinators in compulsory situations. For example situations where the safety of children or adults is at stake, where a child might be taken away from home, where an adult with psychiatric problem might be compulsory taken in hospital care, where a family is threatened to be evicted of their home.

In compulsory situations professionals have a different position. They need to set conditions for a plan and give professional help and the independent coordinator is important to bring together the system world and the life world. Besides their position, professionals don't have the time to widen the circle and prepare the people.

In total we did over 11.000 Family Group Conferences, in 2017 about 300.

There still is a lot of work to inform families about their right and to assist professionals in really leaving control with families and giving them a chance to make their own plan. Society still needs to learn to trust families.



***Different areas***

Most of the Dutch conferences are still about child care and child protection. The situations that ask for a conference become more and more complicated and we believe that this is logical. We do conferences for children and youngsters, but also for adults and elderly.

Mostly in situations where the state is going to intervene or has intervened (child protection, out of home placements, depts, house evictions, psychiatric confinement).

Besides Family Group Conferences, Restorative Conferences and Community Conferences (for neighbourhoods) we also provide trainings for professionals, to support them in working in a different way. We also share our experience and knowledge with local communities and organizations, by training, participating in different meetings, helping them making policies and supporting them in their practical work.

Based on our experience and knowledge we are also active abroad by assisting others in implementing this different approach of citizens.



### **Restorative conferences**

The Eigen Kracht Centrale collaborates with Restorative Justice Netherlands, we share our office in Amsterdam with them. During the 17 years of our existence we have paid attention to restorative conferences for victims and offenders and their networks. We are working on a project to renew the attention for restorative conferences, with a fundraising organisation.

### **Schools**

This year we did a project on restorative practices in schools, with a fundraising organisation and worked in four schools in the Netherlands. We have worked together with the IIRP in the United States and learned a lot from them.

We have also participated in the request for European funding from Erasmus +, initiated by Ligand in Belgium, for a project on restorative practice in schools. The request has been admitted and we have started the project in September, together with 6 countries.

### **Research**

Since the start of the Eigen Kracht Centrale over 60 different researches have been done. Every year an independent institute or 'hogeschool' (school for applied sciences) does research on the satisfaction and follow up of the Family Group Conferences. This year Hogeschool Windesheim also did research on the satisfaction after a year and the results were positive.



### **Sharing experience and knowledge**

A lot of good things happened this year. We started to share a good story each week, on Friday afternoon. A story about a conference, or a story of a child, a family member, a coordinator or a professional. We send this to the readers of our newsletter and share it on twitter, facebook and LinkedIn. It helps to show some of our positive experience.

But there still is a lot of work to do.

So we continue to do everything we can to give citizens the right to keep control of their own lives, even when something goes wrong. And to make sure that every person can make his or her own plan, together with the people that are important to them. The Family Group Conference is a bridge between the life world and the system world and thanks to the independent coordinator, the careful preparation (widening the circle and making sure that everybody can participate safely) and good information it enables family groups to remain owners of their own problems and the solutions.

We have over 11.000 Dutch Family Group Conferences that show us that it works!

We look forward to meeting our European colleagues to exchange stories, experiences and knowledge and to learn from each other!

Amsterdam, October 2017,

Rob van Pagée

Hedda van Lieshout

## **FGCs in Slovakia**

First experience in implementing the FGC model in 2007 was encouraging, bringing real solutions, while eliminating inadequate interventions, life continuum interruptions as well as the loss of both personal and family identity of the children at risk within the social and legal child protection system (SPOD).

The professional team members of NGO Úsmev ako dar got the first information on the FGCs in 2006. Our first teachers were Rob van Pagée and his co-workers from Eigen Kracht Centrale, Netherland who have still been our coaches and mentors.

After viewing the model and comparing the implementation conditions, we started to prepare the first groups of FGC coordinators and educate social workers. There are 30 coordinators being trained and regularly supervised who are ready to prepare the conference whether the referral comes from the SPOD body, local self government, school or the member of the child at risk broader family system. The FGC model implementation team headed by Monika Miklošková (under the Úsmev ako dar) train, coach and supervise the FGC coordinators across Slovakia and provides nation-wide supervision and teambuilding activities for the FGC coordinators.

Based on the particular needs of the Slovakia's regions, there have been implemented educational seminars for professionals included in the SPOD system who can address a certified coordinator for the family at risk.

So far, there have been held 160 FGCs. Our results copy the outputs of our more experienced foreign partners. We can introduce their measurable outcomes, both quantitative and qualitative, in our presentation.

Within the FGC context, 10 years ago the conference model was completely unknown, or little known to social workers. After 10 years of systematic educational work done by Úsmev ako dar, the FGCs are a well-known and welcome model of the social work with families.

**Involvement of conference model into the university social work study has a great credit to the model recognition. At the same time a positive finding reveals that social workers in Slovakia are very open toward the FGC process and plan to implement them into their practice.**

**In 2017 we managed to enforce the incorporation of the model characterisation and principles as a way of involvement of the broader family and other close persons into planning and decision making process for a child (which had not been a common practice so far and social workers had usually made decisions and plans autonomously) into the draft law on SPOD and social guardianship No. 305/2005. Now the draft law is in the government legislative council.**

## Family Group Conferences in Sweden 2017

### Background

Family Group Conferences came to Sweden in the mid-1990s. Two projects were run by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, the first between 1995 and 1997 and the second one between 1998 and 2000.

### Present situation

There is no legal mandate for using Family Group Conferences in Sweden, but the values underpinning the method are consistent with legislation.

There has been no national funding for developing Family Group Conferences after 2000 and no state funded national organization that takes responsibility for promoting or supporting FGCs. Predominantly two municipalities take responsibility for promoting and supporting FGCs in Sweden; Höör and Botkyrka. All FGC practice is organized in the municipal social welfare/child protection system.

This last year a few new municipalities have taken an interest in family group conferences and started to implement the model in their organizations.

The aim of the work of the national coordinator for social welfare for children and youth is to improve their opportunities to make their voice heard and to get the support they need. The national coordinator has taken an interest in family group conferences and the interest for the method on a national level is beginning to rise. She is the head speaker from Sweden on the Nordic conference on FGC.

### The ninth Nordic conference on FGC

This year the Nordic conference on FGC is organized by Höör and Botkyrka and takes place in Malmö. Our hope is that this event will contribute to an increased interest in family group conferences among local authorities in Sweden.

### Coordinators

Most municipalities in Sweden employ coordinators for one assignment a time. The coordinators are mostly lay people and common to all of them are that they are accustomed to working with people, without necessarily having caring professions. Botkyrka have full time employed coordinators.

Ewa Näslund  
Municipality of Höör



## Family Group Conferences News from Switzerland

- In Switzerland family group conferences are not yet known in a broad field. We still work on establishing them.
- The network for family group conferences is under construction and is growing.
- The guardianship authorities are interested in the method of family group conferences. As everywhere we must be persistent in order to give the family group conference the position we are looking for. Of course, it is the commitment of a lot of individuals that promotes family group conferences to be recognized as a helpful method.
- In some areas of Switzerland, as for example in Biel, we realize a growing demand for family group conferences.
- Beside family group conferences in its pure shape, several persons and institutions start to integrate elements of the method in their work. They seem to be quite successful. For instance, they implement family-group-like conferences after a period during which a family has been attended by a professional family-advisor or they use the conference in order to find out whether or not a legal advisor is necessary.
- As since several years the formation in family group conferences in Switzerland is provided by the Fachhochschule (college of higher education) in Bern, we have an increasing number of certificated coordinators in Switzerland. They are now building their small regional networks to implement the method.
- In several regions, some providers of family group conferences managed to cooperate with the public authorities in order to encourage this method. Some others think about working with laypersons as coordinators, as it is known in parts of Germany.
- In Biel the first bilingual coordinator started to work.
- Family group conferences started to expand in other contexts as with disabled or elderly people. The results were encouraging.

Olten, 26.9.2017

Dr. Regula Enderlin, Stiftung Arkadis

Christa Quick, Familien Support Bern West

**RK centrum** is the centre for Support, Development and Promotion of Family Group Conferences (FGC). It was established in January 2017 as part of a joint project of Amalthea (organisation providing social services for families and children) and Energeia (generates eco-friendly electricity to raise funds for social and educational activities and implements the projects at the same time).

**RK centrum** follows up on the work of the FGC team (formerly under Amalthea), which started promoting the idea of introducing FGC in the Czech Republic in April 2013. Back then, FGC were practically unknown even among the professional public in the Czech Republic.

We conduct FGC in Pardubice and Hradec Králové Regions and around (two out of 14 regions). The team has 1 administrator (CCI, regional manager) and 4 co-ordinators. The main objective is to promote the idea and vision of FGC and pursue development of this approach across the country. **RK centrum** spreads awareness of FGC by means of discussion sessions, lectures, educational seminars and expert conferences. We have established cooperation with universities and we organise methodological meetings for other organisations providing FGC. We deal with motivations of FGC key workers (notably social-legal child protection authorities) to help them understand the meaning and benefits of FGC and make more intense use of them.

#### History of FGC in our company:

- 📅 2010: visit to Scotland, first encounter with FGC
- 📅 2011: Lumos organised a course for co-ordinators (2 co-ordinators from Amalthea)
- 📅 2012: FGC methodology issued, inspired by the Scottish model
- 📅 2013: Pilot project for FGC implementation in social work with endangered families, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA)
- 📅 2013: visit to Slovakia, Úsmev ako dar (organisation providing FGC)
- 📅 2014: Involvement in a MLSA project for FGC application based on the Dutch model of Eigen Kracht
- 📅 2015: Development of evaluation analysis of MLSA project and methodological papers for co-ordinators, administrators and social-legal child protection authority staff
- 📅 2017: RK centrum established

#### Implementation of FGC in practice faces the following challenges:

- 📅 distrust in the approach as such
- 📅 distrust in the power of the family
- 📅 distrust in the family being able to take over responsibility
- 📅 concerns about loss of control over the case
- 📅 concerns about presence of children at FGC
- 📅 experts' unwillingness to participate in FGC outside working hours

We are aware that FGC advancement will require a change of mindset not only in the social care sphere but across the society. We are strongly encouraged by the fact that we have realised 50 FGC. Positive feedback from experts and, most importantly, from the families and children continue to convince us that we have set out in the right direction.



## European Network Conference 2017- France

This is the first time some French persons participate. The reason being that FGC is developing slowly in France. To understand how we can move forward, you have to take into account some cultural and political characteristics about France : first, social policies (such as child protection, fight against poverty, aging, handicap) are decentralized on department level with 100 different actors so a minister cannot “order” to start FGC. Second, social work in France is mostly individual. Community social work is not much practiced. However, several laws (2002, 2007, 2016...) have insisted upon the importance of participation and professionals not taking decisions instead of parents and family.

### Achievements

In 2012 a lot was written, an association founded ([contact@questiondejustice.fr](mailto:contact@questiondejustice.fr)) and the first trainings started. This June, FGC was presented for the first time at a big, national conference, in Paris! The speaker just forgot to mention his sources. This year, a second association was initiated aiming at training citizens who want to experiment FGC coordination on a voluntarily (pro bono) basis.

More important is :

- The NGO ATD Quart-Monde (Altogether for Dignity) grasps empowerment as its core values and sees in FGC an interesting way of leveraging up the right for poor families to be listened to and be part of the decision making process about their lives.
- at least 5 departments are committed into developing FGC : one department took the initiative for an Erasmus project and got it. La Gironde works with some partners present here I suppose : England, Germany...in another department, a lot of the placements within family- or friends network are preceded by a FGC since 3 years.
- people ask for training as a coordinator on individual basis and since last year they start asking that while being employed by departments
- a prison starts an experiment of FGC's to prepare the start in society after a long imprisonment (FGC with « compliments » as a start and a restorative part before the plan)
- the first conferences are hold and have gone well - an article will follow
- the question of evaluation of FGC is being studied
- interest is growing, more social services and associations are talking about it, it's sometimes called « the tool of the future », pilots'll start this or next year
- a network of professionals involved in child protection has created a Laboratory for FGC mid 2017 (LCF - [lclabodescf@gmail.com](mailto:lclabodescf@gmail.com)). The aim is to build a website and develop contacts with decision makers to promote FGC.

### Challenges :

- find private & public funds to launch a national experiment on several pilot sites with an evaluation of impact
- organize a colloquium
- estimating the costs of FGC and deciding who should pay for it
- finding situations to start conferences ... where coordinators are available
- organizations don't know how to integrate FGC and indeed have a lot of questions to face : should coordinators be insiders or outsiders ? For the moment insiders : so how to replace them when they are doing FGC ? Dedicate someone would be simple, but then the neutrality would be more in danger. A lot of social workers seem interested to do this and become part-time coordinator
- The cooperation of other social workers of the same family is sometimes refused and disturb the few conferences we have

We have gone some steps further lately and see the future with optimism.

# Highlights FGC in Norway 2017

Norway: 5,5 million inhabitants, 50 000 children+ in child welfare, 70/80 % of the children receive help at home, 20-30 % out of home placement (11 000 children in fostercare, appr 30-35 % of the children are placed in family or network).

The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) is the governmental office under the Ministry of Children and family Affairs that is responsible for child welfare.

Since 2007 Bufdir is given responsibility of implementation of FGC.

Key persons in the five regions are given responsibilities for:

- Training in all municipalities / communities and the state
- Support / coach social workers in method fidelity after training
- The stately system is in charge of around 300 coordinators in Norway.
- Every municipality can arrange for a FGC (Recruitment, training, group-consultation)
- Projects and development

<b>FGC activity in child welfare</b>	<b>NEW</b>
2007	250-300
2008	300-350
2009	350-400
2010	400-450
2012	650
2017	1200

## Some highlights and focus

### **1. National research project "Trying out FGC in foster care" (2011-2014)**

The politicians in Norway have stated that FGC should be a recommended method in foster care. It was written in the preparation of the changes of the child welfare law.

We now focus on following up the project, and articles are being presented also this year from the researchers. We are developing a strategy plan from 2018-2020 regarding FGC and fostercare.

### **2. Implementing FGC in most child welfare institutions**

The implementation will go on for several years.

### **3. Using FGC in times of acute crises NEW RESEARCH 2017-2021**

Challenge in Norway: 50 % of placements are acute.

More and more common to use FGC in these cases and within 48 hours – 1 week.

Price of the research project: 300 000 Euros

### **4. FGC and domestic violence: a pilot project finished and to be evaluated this year**

## **Family Group Conferences in England -update for the European FGC Network by Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive, Family Rights Group**

### 1. Family Rights Group

Family Rights Group is a national charity whose objectives are to enable children to live safely within their family network, where possible, and to strengthen the positive family and community support networks of young people who cannot live with their parents. We run a free advice service for parents whose children are in need, are at risk, or are in the care system and for relatives and friends considering raising a child who cannot remain at home. We also champion practices that maximise children's chances of being raised by, or safely maintaining a relationship with, their family.

### 2. Family Group Conference (FGCs) in England

Family Rights Group hosts the English Family Group Conference (FGC) Network, has developed national FGC standards, including an accreditation system for local English and Welsh FGC services. We also developed a post-qualifying accreditation award for interested FGC co-ordinators.

Family Rights Group promotes the use of FGCs and delivers training to FGC co-ordinators and consultancy support to localities wishing to set up an FGC service. Around three quarters (76%)<sup>1</sup> of English local authorities run or commission some form of FGC service. This is a significant increase when compared to 38% in 2001<sup>2</sup>. We are about to embark on a survey of FGC services which will enable us to update this information and get a better picture of the size of each FGC service – our impression is that that local FGCs services are growing in size.

FGCs are promoted in Government statutory guidance to local authorities on working with parents whose child is at risk of being removed through court proceedings. Nevertheless most families are not offered an FGC prior to their child being removed. Family Rights Group is therefore lobbying for a new legal duty on local authorities to offer families an FGC prior to a child entering the care system.

### 3. Crises in the family justice and child welfare systems in England and Wales

Care order applications to remove a child from his/her parents are at record levels and the numbers of children in care is at the highest level in over 30 years. The most senior family judge has described there being a crisis in the family justice system. Leaders within the child welfare system have similarly described it as being in crisis. There are multiple reasons for this including:

- **A rise in deprivation: children living in the poorest areas in the UK** are much more likely to become involved with the child protection system and to be taken into care than children in less deprived areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Family Rights Group survey conducted in 2015 (unpublished)

<sup>2</sup> Brown, L. (2002) Follow up survey of Family Group Conference Use Across England and Wales. University of Bath Research Summary

## Glasgow City Council Family Group Decision Making

The North East of Glasgow's FGDM team was established in September 2016 with 4 coordinators, a Team Leader and an administrative worker. Following completion of the accredited training course through Robert Gordon University and the securing of premises, the team started accepting referrals in November 2016 with a focus on children on the cusp of care, young people aged 14 plus, children who had been accommodated in local authority care for up to 6 months and vulnerable unborn babies. Information sessions were held with the wider Social Work team, and allocated workers for children who fit these criteria were asked to make referrals. The criteria has since been expanded to include children who have been on the child protection register for over one year.

In addition to coordinating family meetings, the service also offers Extended Family Network searches. Our admin worker is based at the city's main library two days per week researching family trees. The information gathered from these have been used to identify supportive people within families to offer protection to children. In addition to this, they offer information for children to help them understand their identity and family.

There has been a great response from within the Social Work team and, to date, there have been approximately 150 referrals. Within this, there have been a number of "good news" stories in which children have been able to remain at home or within their extended families safely and anecdotal feedback from families has suggested that they feel included and empowered by the approach. An evaluation is currently underway, but the success and positive outcomes achieved so far has resulted in the service being expanded to the other localities within Glasgow.

The four coordinators have also undertaken the Lifelong Links training through the Family Rights Group and are starting to offer this service for young people in order to reintroduce links with their families and support their identity.



Although Wales is in the UK, the responsibility for Social care is devolved to the Welsh Assembly our parliament, and in April 2016, Wales introduced the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act and it signifies a change in legislation for Children, Adults and Carers in Wales. The Act fundamentally changes the way social services work. Wellbeing underpins the whole system, linking through to the role that early intervention and prevention can play in promoting wellbeing, to how people can be empowered by information, advice and assistance, by being involved in the design and operation of services and by making their own active contribution to their own wellbeing. People will be able to get information, advice and assistance about different kinds of care and support when they need some extra help to carry on leading their lives. This service will be tailored to be more accessible and user-friendly for children and young people. The Act means that the legislation for children is now significantly different in Wales from the rest of UK. The law in relation to Child Protection and Care Orders has not changed and the 1989 Children Act stands in respect of these areas.

The act gives no legal standing for Family Group Conferences, but FGC's certainly fit with the ethos of the act which is to empower service users.

Across Wales we have around half of our local authorities with access to some kind of FGC project, this varies from large in house services, small and medium size NGO's and spot purchasing arrangements. While always sticking to the model, there are a variety of ways in which FGC's are used across Wales ; The usual safeguarding referrals from Social Services, under the new act there is no child in need status but requires social services to assess people's care and support needs based around a What Matters conversation with each service user. We still have referrals under the child protection and PLO court system. Some projects are exploring using FGC's for reunification of children returning to family.

We also have many projects in Wales offering FGC's as part of our Families First Initiative, this is funding that has been targeted at early intervention services and Family Group Conferences can work with families before they enter the Social Care system, for example, a child or young person not attending school, to promote parents working together when a child has a diagnosis of an illness. Families cannot access FGC's through this route if they are already open to Social Services.

Other examples of how we use FGC's in Wales are in the Justice system. Barnardos have just completed a project linked to a prison in South Wales and begun a new service for veterans who have been or at risk of being involved in the justice system.

As a Network we meet regularly to look at national issues in Wales and how to keep open lines of communication open with the Welsh government so that we can influence future policy and secure the model stays in Wales. There are 3 Quality assured projects in Wales and 2 accredited Family Rights Group tutors.

While proud of our unique position in Wales we continue to enjoy being part of the UK network where we learn from our English and Scottish colleagues.