

// Foundations

What Works Centre for Children & Families

Understanding Family Group Conferencing

Foundations journey



The session will cover

- Findings from our FGC Randomized Control trial (RCT)
- Scoping of FGC use Summer 2023
- Key findings
- Next steps and plans for Foundations



BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS





FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING RCT

The evaluation



WHY?

Aims were:

- To understand the effect of referring families for a family group conference on the likelihood of children entering care, as well as other outcomes for children and families entering pre-proceedings.
- To understand how family group conferences were delivered, for example identifying the barriers and enablers to successful implementation.
- To determine the cost benefits of implementing family group conferences for local authorities.

HOW?

- Large scale Randomised Control Trial (RCT), across 21 LAs.
- Information was gathered from LAs about whether those children became looked after, their living arrangements and whether care proceedings were issued.
- Analysis compared the data between families referred for family group conferences and those not.
- Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) also undertaken, to look at how family group conferences were implemented and perceived.

Key findings



- Children less likely to be in care one year later (36%) compared to those not referred (45%).
 - Children spent significantly less time in care 6 months later (87 days, on average), compared to those not referred (115 days, on average).
 - Less likely to have had care proceedings issued (59%) compared to those not referred (72%).
 - Over three quarters (76%) of local authorities thought family group conferences at pre-proceedings stage had made a difference to how they work with families.
 - FGCs were found to be cost effective, with a saving of £960 per child referred in the first year.
- **High quality delivery is central to effectiveness.**
 - **A range of other interventions are required to be offered alongside FGC to meet the needs of children and families.**
 - **Further research is needed into the effectiveness of FGC at other points within the system.**

Scoping work 2023

Rationale



1. Based on our trial, we estimated that if FGCs were to be rolled out across England, 2,293 fewer children would go into care in a 12-month period, which would save the public purse over £150 million over two years.
2. We knew from the Cascade Family Voice survey that around 80% of local authorities in England report delivering an FGC service, with the majority of these services being run ‘in house’ by the local authority itself (68%). Most respondents reported offering FGCs at pre-proceeding stage (~95%) in England
3. We also understood that there were high levels of variation in how FGC is delivered across the country
4. Our trial found a positive impact for FGC use however the wider evidence base is inconclusive. We were keen to understand more about how FGC is used ‘on the ground’ as well as keep abreast with latest research and understand where the gaps in the evidence base lie.

Scoping work 2023

What did we do?



1. Conversations with 15 Local Authorities
2. Talked to independent FGC providers
3. Discussed with key stakeholders
4. Conducted a systematic review of the literature looking at effectiveness of FGC
5. Developed a master spreadsheet to understand which LAs who were using FGC at the pre-proceedings stage

Key findings - Access



Capability barriers

- LAs reported resource constraints preventing them from expanding their FGC offer.
- There was large variation in the skills, professional backgrounds and pay of co-ordinators

Opportunity barriers

- More work is needed to understand for whom FGC works best inc. minoritised groups
- Practitioners tend to view FGC working better for some family situations than others
- Access to FGC, even when a service is available is not routinely embedded in LA structures
- Not all families are offered the opportunity of FGC

Motivation barriers

- Not all families accept the offer of an FGC
- The role of referrer seems to be key to securing access for families
- The role of senior leaders giving profile and resources to FGC was identified as essential

Next steps



There are barriers across the system that need to be addressed if we want more families to be meaningfully offered the opportunity of an FGC at pre-proceedings stage, and we need new work on monitoring to be able to measure the success of this. We want to take an active role in championing FGCs and our work will focus on four main areas:

- Continuing to make the case for government investment in FGCs at pre-proceedings
- Direct work with local authority managers and leaders to ‘make the case’ for investment in FGC services locally
- New work to understand data and monitoring in local areas, with a view to improving the routine data collection in local areas so we can understand the ongoing impact of FGCs on outcomes
- New qualitative research with families to understand their experience of being offered and receiving an FGC, with a particular focus on the experience of minoritized ethnic families.



THANKYOU