

Honoring of New Zealand's Progressive Transformative System Change

In a land far away, more than 18 years ago, courageous Maori, governmental and community leaders came together to develop progressive child welfare and youth justice policy that created the “family group conference.”

This legislation became a beacon of hope for many countries. In the U.S., the implementation of family group decision making practice swelled from six communities in 1996 to more than 300 in 2007. Judicial and administrative leaders, practitioners and community organizers now champion it as “the way to do child welfare.”

There is no turning back to business as usual. Results show that when extended families, their natural supports, and the broader community are included in making decisions about their most precious resource – their children – everyone benefits.

Family Group Decision Making Timeline

- 1989:** New Zealand legislates the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, creating world-renowned progressive social policy and the opportunity for system transformation in both child welfare and youth justice.
- 1993-1995:** Gale Burford and Joan Pennell implement the Family Group Decision Making project in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada.
- 1989:**
- 1994:** Mark Hardin, ABA Center on Children and the Law, is commissioned by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to study the legal and policy construct of the family group conference (FGC). Hardin authors the first significant publication on FGC published in the U.S., entitled *in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: Learning from the Experience of New Zealand*.
- 1995:** The first wave of New Zealand practitioners and trainers present at a well-regarded child welfare-juvenile court conference in California.
- 1994:**
- 1995-present:** The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges promotes comprehensive, national training on family group conferencing. Many court systems support and champion this approach to decision making.
- 1995:** American Humane is awarded a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to study the social policy construct of implementing family group conferencing in the U.S.
- 1996:** American Humane conducts a survey of communities in the U.S. currently engaged in the implementation of FGDM, and uncovers approximately six communities engaged in this work.
- 1997:** After discovery of multiple family involvement models in the U.S., American Humane selects the term *family group decision making* (FGDM) to encompass the family group conference and family unity model approaches to child welfare decision making.
- 1997:** American Humane publishes *Innovations in the 21st Century* which provided communities with sufficient information to support the design and implementation of FGDM.
- 1997:** American Humane hosts its first annual Roundtable on FGDM, in three sites: San Francisco, Detroit and Philadelphia. Approximately 200 individuals attend these events.
- 1997-2004:** American Humane dedicates sufficient resources to develop written publications, videos, a comprehensive training program, website and other materials to support the advancement of FGDM in the U.S. and Canada.

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 **National Center on
Family Group Decision Making**

- 1998:** American Humane establishes its FGDM National Advisory Committee.
- 1999:** American Humane establishes The National Center on Family Group Decision Making, with a mission to build community capacity to implement high-quality, effective FGDM processes that are philosophically congruent with the central values and beliefs of this approach.
- 2000:** American Humane launches the most comprehensive website on FGDM, including a myriad of free resources and a threaded discussion group.
- 2001:** The New Zealand government generously agrees to have American Humane distribute its seven-part video series on family group conferencing.
- 2003:** American Humane produces a *Protecting Children* journal that culminates all significant FGDM research in the U.S., Canada and some European countries.
- 2004:** Annual FGDM conference attendance reaches an all-time high at 650 participants.
- 2004:** American Humane, in partnership with IIRP, develops a video entitled *Family Voices*.
- 2004:** American Humane enters into a partnership with Casey Family Programs to support their implementation of family group conferencing in their local field offices.
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2004: For the first time, *Helping in Child Protective Services* incorporates FGDM into mainstream case practice guide.
- 2005:** Since inception, American Humane has provided training and technical assistance in more than 35 states and the District of Columbia.
- ^{1994:}
2006: At the Coming Home Conference in November, New Zealand recommits its resources, energy and support to implement family group conferencing in child welfare and youth justice systems.
- 2007:** American Humane bestows an award to New Zealand recognizing its generosity, ingenuity and innovativeness in developing and formally legislating the family group conference.
- 2007:** American Humane launches a “Model Integration Workgroup” to establish a blueprint or framework for how front-end decision making models and FGDM approaches can work together.
- 2008:** The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (HR 6893) is signed into federal law. This important legislation highlights the support of FGDM programming and services through competitive “family connection” grants in the Department of Health and Human Services.
- 2008:** American Humane releases a “Purpose, Values and Processes” paper that serves to enhance the understanding and classification of FGDM for the purposes of funding application, research and evaluation, training and education, and practice guidance.
- 2009:** American Humane launches the Restorative Justice for Youth initiative to bridge the gap between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and to address the needs of youths, in both systems with accountability and care.
- 2010:** American Humane, in partnership with the FGDM Guidelines Committee, releases *Guidelines for Family Group Decision Making in Child Welfare* in order to facilitate understanding and to promote best practice.

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