

Introduction, Principles and Processes

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We are pleased to share this annotated bibliography with you. It is one part of a larger review of studies of family engagement and decision making in child welfare being carried out by the four authors. The authors are grateful for the support given during the development of the bibliography by the American Humane Association's National Center on Family Group Decision Making, particularly in the person of Lisa Merkel-Holguin. We thank the Henry Kempe Center at the University of Colorado, for offering to sustain the project. The Kempe Center's early and ongoing commitment to protecting children makes this a fitting home for the bibliography.

You can find brief biographical information about the four of us, along with our individual e-mail addresses, under Team Member Bios. To orient you to this bibliography and to the overall review, we have included comments on some of the important issues in comparing child welfare practices across cultures and legislative and policy contexts (The Contexts) and provided an overview of the studies reviewed thus far (The Studies) as well as a summary of how we are going about the larger review (Methods of Review).

We have developed a process to regularly update this annotated bibliography by continuing to collect and review studies. In this way, we see the bibliography as an electronic resource that will continue to be built over time. We welcome your suggestions and inquiries. You may send additional studies for consideration to Kate Morris at Kate.Morris@nottingham.ac.uk. Feel free to contact any of us and watch this space for ongoing updates, with new annotations. At the time of this posting (November, 2012), we have additional studies and reports to review.

We have long been mindful that family group conferencing enthusiasts, as Judge Mick Brown, former New Zealand principal youth court judge once described himself, have said from the start that research was going to be necessary to convince legislators, policymakers and others that "it works." This theme was noted in two international, online surveys (Burford, Morris, & Nixon, 2007; Nixon, Burford, & Quinn, 2005). Practitioners around the globe, like so many who attend the international conferences on family group decision making, want to see the value of their work, and what they believe are positive outcomes with families, made visible. Their enthusiasm is well-grounded in their experiences with families. Professor James Whittaker once described family group conferencing as "perhaps the most intriguing child welfare innovation to arise in

the last quarter century” (Whittaker, 2000). He identified the following six “key questions for planners and practitioners,” which are still relevant and timely:

- What was the specific cultural context within which the service innovation arose and what are the cultural requisites that sustain it at present in its culture of origin?
- What modifications will likely need to be made if the innovation is to be adopted in another country or culture?
- What is the valuative and empirical-evidential base for the innovation, and what questions should inform the next generation of studies on its efficacy?
- What are the points of potential conflict and complementarity between the service innovation and the existing service continuum?
- What will likely be the key issues in implementation, and what “network of champions” will be there to sustain the innovation during the critical phase of its introduction?
- By what outcome measure(s) will the innovation be adjudged a success? (pp. xi – xii)

Mindful of James Whittaker’s key questions, we have sought to locate evaluation and research studies regarding the inclusion of the family group in child welfare decision making. In November 2007, we invited our international networks to help us identify relevant studies broadly defined. Our intent has been to take an inclusive approach to the review. This means we were, and are, interested in reading reports and studies that cover a wide range of theories, designs, methods and approaches to family engagement in child welfare decision making.

First, the review team met to see the “lay of the land.” We sorted the submissions by country. We felt strongly from the beginning that we would prefer to read original research reports, even if they needed to be translated into English, than to read publications or executive summaries that had been extrapolated from those reports. Of course, this is not always possible. It was then that we decided to make the annotated bibliography a first step in a larger systematic review and to note in each annotation the original source if we were reading from a secondary one. It was also during that time that we began using the term “family engagement” as short-hand to describe the scope of the enquiry. We are interested in any report or study from which we can understand further:

- What happens when families are involved in decision making;
- What happens to children when families are involved in decision making; and
- What happens to systems when families are involved in decision making.

One purpose in presenting summaries of the studies we are reviewing is to engage you in the discussion. We hope that in reading the annotations you may be stimulated to refine your own questions about the work and join in conversations and exchanges with your colleagues and others to deepen our collective understanding of family engagement in child welfare decision making.

The next steps include writing a literature review specifically aimed at practitioners; continuing to identify research articles that we could recommend for publication in peer-reviewed journals and offering authors specific feedback. We hope to engage established and up-and-coming researchers in ongoing research forums on family engagement. We plan to publish our own

review in multiple parts, including research methods for family-engagement context, family engagement as rights-focused practice, evidence-informed family engagement practice and a literature review of emerging themes. Thus far, we have guest edited a special issue of *Child Welfare* (Pennell et al, 2011) on child and family rights and engagement, have a book under contract (Palgrave), and Connolly & Morris have published a book (2012) together.

The Contexts

Child protection work exists within a complex environment that is strongly influenced by individual, professional and societal values. Child welfare systems are influenced by the culture of the society within which they exist. Culture shapes our expectations of the state, the community and the family, and how they each respond to children needing care and protection. Although there would appear to be considerable commonality across child welfare systems internationally, there are inevitably cultural differences that give meaning and character to the work.

Structural systems that provide the mechanisms through which services are delivered differ across international boundaries. In some countries, these services may be primarily organized at a central government level, while others may be provided by local nongovernment systems. Legal frameworks also differ. How the law provides for the needs of children and families clearly affects the way in which practice is undertaken within a particular jurisdiction. Hence, the structural system and a country's legal framework will critically shape both the principles that inform practice and the way in which interventions occur.

It is important to consider the cultural context within which each study in this bibliography has been undertaken. As countries have adopted family decision making as an engagement strategy, inevitable adaptations have been made and practices differ in important ways. This makes international comparisons much more complex. Indeed, the notion of family decision making itself may adapt more readily to some jurisdictions than to others. For example, societies that focus on the nuclear family -- mother, father and children -- may find the notion of involving extended kinship networks in decision making much more challenging than societies in which collective responsibility for children is a cultural norm.

Of course in general, cultures are open and dynamic systems in which change is a consequence of a creative interplay of ideas, values and activities. In this sense, the extension of family decision making across international boundaries is an exciting and enriching process and one that provides us with opportunities to explore our differences and challenges as well as our successes.

The Studies

The studies reviewed in this bibliography reveal the range and diversity of approaches to involve families in achieving good outcomes for their children. The studies vary in focus, purpose and

methodology. The keyword search, therefore, enables the reader to identify reports that are relevant to their own practice or areas of interest and also allows the material to be grouped by categories such as country and field of practice.

Family engagement strategies are not uniform -- this international annotated bibliography demonstrates the differences among countries and across cultures. The reader cannot, therefore, make assumptions that all reports or articles refer to similar processes. All the submissions, however, are concerned with exploring how children's kinship and family networks can contribute to their well-being, and a significant number of the entries address family involvement in decision making from a rights-based perspective. This suggests that family engagement practices are not value-free; instead, they are often concerned with promoting the rights of families and the need to use family expertise. This basis for the services that are developed can sit at odds with traditional approaches to evaluation, which use progress measures that may not reflect the innovative intentions of family-engagement services. Developing responsive research and evaluation strategies and methods is therefore an emerging theme from this international review.

The majority of the reports and articles submitted show family engagement in decision making to be a positive, developing child welfare practice that secures good outcomes for children. The very small number of reports identifying less promising outcomes raises important questions about the feasibility of comparisons across different contexts.

The submissions often provide information about process (including specific practice developments such as advocates for children and roles of coordinators) and strategies (how family engagement services are developed and implemented and the benefits for agencies or local services). There are a limited number of studies focused specifically on outcomes for children -- this reflects that many services are in a developmental stage and may not have the data to reveal mid- and long-term outcomes. As we update this annotated bibliography over time, we anticipate that an increasing number of submissions will describe impacts and thus, contribute to the body of knowledge about the effects of family engagement in child welfare decision making.

Methods of Review

Producing this annotated bibliography is one part of the long-term involvement of each of the team members to develop what we are now calling an evidence base for family engagement in child welfare decision making. Our aim was (and is) to identify, assess and synthesize the persistent, and at times conflicting, findings on family engagement. Selection of the four team members was deliberate, and our values and backgrounds shaped how we envisioned and organized our collaborative undertaking.

We started our exploration of family engagement by first acknowledging our shared commitment to family rights. Our rationale for focusing on family engagement came out of a normative stance that children, young people and their families should have a say over their affairs. Our assumption or theory of change was that family engagement is a means of furthering family rights. Thus, we asked how families can take part in making decisions and carrying out plans that uphold their sense of mutual identity, belonging and accountability *and* safeguard their child and adult members. This question points to the complexity of family rights.

The concept of family rights evokes the cultures of families as well as the human rights of family members, individually and collectively. We speculated that family rights could be advanced by varying degrees of family engagement and that family disengagement might be crucial depending on the stage of work, the age and directions of young people, the extent of domestic violence and so forth. Consequently, in studying the evidence base for family engagement, we needed to map identifying “sign posts” in varied contexts.

We intentionally sought diversity in examining family engagement in child welfare decision making. This goal was reflected in the composition of our team, with members residing in different national or regional contexts: New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the Northeastern and Southeastern United States. These contexts forced us to check that a term such as “family engagement” made sense across jurisdictions. Each of us brought different local and international networks that helped us identify relevant studies and understand the child welfare context in which the evidence on family engagement was produced. Marie, in her discussion of divergent child welfare systems, provides the context in which to interpret the findings from the studies included in the annotated bibliography.

In mapping family engagement in child welfare decision making, we each brought extensive experience in family-engagement practice, policy, training and evaluation. These overlapping endeavors led to our recognizing how each influences the evidence for family engagement and in turn, is influenced by this evidence. From our experience, a specific model for family engagement in child welfare decision making may provide helpful guidance on how to engage families; at the same time, no model works on its own, and any model needs to be embedded within an environment that makes it work. Accordingly, our review of the literature will not only look at findings but also search for factors specifying under which conditions an approach is effective or not. In particular, we wish to develop, modify and test our theory of change that advances family rights. To do so, we will delve more extensively into the processes through which and contexts in which family engagement contributes to or detracts from family rights.

Our experience in all these sectors of family engagement led to our reaching out for studies in the “scientific” literature and from other forums, such as family and child advocacy, administrative monitoring and practice guidance. This meant that we needed to pursue the “fugitive” literature that is often less accessible and has less apparent methodology. A major limitation of our study team is that we are all only English-speaking and from countries that Marie identifies as having child welfare systems of child protection rather than family support, community building or social development. In practical terms, the further development of the annotated bibliography will need to rely on contributors providing abstracts in English.

Thanks to the Information Center of the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, a review was conducted of a number of databases: The Information Centre database, Informit, Sociological Abstracts, PsychINFO, ChildData, Index New Zealand, New Zealand National Bibliography, EconLit, Social Services Abstracts, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, EBSCO MasterFILE Premier, Australia/NZ Resource Centre, and Gale General OneFile. Our main approach, however, to collecting studies has been snowballing, that is, pursuing leads on studies through our networks of scholars, activists, practitioners, policymakers, administrators and educators.

References

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Team Member Bios

Gale Burford, MSW, Ph.D., is a professor of social work and director of the Child Welfare Staff Training and Development Partnership at the University of Vermont, Department of Social Work. He has experience in teaching, training and carrying out research in Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom. He is co-editor with Joe Hudson of *Family Group Conferencing: New Directions in Community-Centered Child and Family Practice* (Aldine/Transaction Pubs).

Marie Connolly, Ph.D., Chair of Social Work, Melbourne School of Health Sciences, The University of Melbourne. She served as Chief Social Worker for New Zealand from 2005 until 2010. Previously, she was associate professor and director of the Te Awatea Violence Research Centre at the University of Canterbury. She has published extensively in the area of child welfare

and family practice, including eight related books, most recently, *Child Death by Maltreatment* (2007) and *Morals, Rights and Practice in the Human Services* (2008). She is particularly interested in the participatory rights of children and families in the context of child welfare, and more generally, in human rights-based practice. She has a statutory social work background in child care and protection.

Kate Morris is Associate Professor in Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham. She was part of the group that introduced family group conferences into the U.K. in the early 1990s and has researched their use in a variety of U.K. settings. She managed the national evaluation of the U.K. Children's Fund, a large-scale national preventive program, and more recently led the literature review of whole-family approaches commissioned by the U.K. Cabinet Office. She has published in the areas of prevention and social exclusion, whole family approaches in social care, family participation and multi-agency working.

Joan Pennell, MSW, Ph.D., is a professor of social work and director of the Center for Family and Community Engagement at North Carolina State University. Her center has received funding for work on family engagement in child welfare, schools, family violence, youth justice, and system of care. With Gale Burford, she directed the Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada) demonstration of family group conferencing in situations of child maltreatment and domestic violence. She co-authored *Community Research as Empowerment* (Oxford University Press), *Widening the Circle* (NASW Press), and *Safety, Fairness, and Stability* (Georgetown University), and she was the lead editor of a special issue of *Child Welfare* on child and family rights.

Studies

Holland, S., & O'Neill, S. (2006),
'We had to be there to make sure it was what we wanted': Enabling children's participation in family decision-making through the family group conference.

***Childhood*, 13(1), 91-111.**

The article represents findings from a small, qualitative study of family group conferencing in Wales. The research explored the notion of empowerment of children and young people within 17 family meetings. Twenty-five children and young people were interviewed within one month of their meetings, and 13 were re-interviewed six months later. Participating adult family members, social workers and coordinators were also interviewed. Although young people positively commented on their participation in the family meetings, the authors argue there are both risks and benefits for children and young people associated with taking part in family meetings. The risks include children or young people not being listened to, their participation being tokenistic and their exposure to family conflict. The young people differentiated between

being listened to and feeling influential. While almost all felt they were listened to, only half felt influential after the family meeting. The families reported feeling a sense of “togetherness” once they had reached a plan. The authors found a different prioritization of the purpose of the family meeting: While the adults tended to prioritize practical matters, the young people tended to prioritize bringing the family together and having an opportunity to confront family members and their behavior.

Keywords: child participation, qualitative, child welfare

Holland, S., & Rivett, M. (2008).

‘Everyone started shouting’: Making connections between the process of family group conferences and family therapy practice.

British Journal of Social Work, 38, 21-38.

This article represents findings from a small, qualitative study of family group conferencing in Wales. The research explored the therapeutic and emotional aspects of the family group conference, and the findings are discussed in relation to the similarities and differences between family group conferences and family therapy sessions. Twenty-five children and young people were interviewed within one month of their conferences and were re-interviewed six months later. Participating adult family members, social workers and coordinators were also interviewed. The authors suggest that although no overt attempts are made to facilitate therapeutic change within a family group conference, the data indicate that it can be one of the possible consequences of the conference process. Family group conferences were found to have strong emotional elements during the meeting process, with therapeutic elements for many participants. A small minority did not experience the expression of raw emotion as helpful. The authors conclude that there is potential value in cross-fertilizing ideas across the family group conference and family therapy areas.

Keywords: Wales, United Kingdom; U.K., qualitative, process evaluation

Crampton, D. (2006).

When do social workers and family members try family group decision making? A process evaluation.

International Journal of Child & Family Welfare, 9(3), 131-143.

This study describes relevant characteristics of families selected or rejected for referral to a family group decision making conference and distinguishes between families that elected to accept the referral from those that turned it down and between families that were able to arrive at a plan to keep children within the extended family and those that did not. The multiyear project was specifically designed to divert children from foster care and keep them with extended

family. Five hundred ninety-three referrals received over a five-year period were coded for relevant characteristics for the child, the family, the parents and the maltreatment. Referral for a family meeting required unanimous agreement among the professionals involved. Logistical regression was used to identify case characteristics associated with the decision to refer, the decision to take up the offer of a meeting, the families that took up the offer of a meeting and the families that developed a plan. The results of the study take a step in the direction of answering the question about which families are a good fit with family meetings and in what circumstances. In this study, child welfare professionals and family members showed high independent agreement in situations where kin could be identified, in situations that involved parental substance abuse or improper parental supervision, or in situations when the child had special needs. The study sheds light on the important question of the characteristics of families and circumstances that make for a good fit with family group decision making.

Keywords: US; Michigan; child welfare; child permanency; process evaluation; quantitative data

**Crea, T. M., Crampton, D. S., Abramson-Madden, A., & Usher, C. L. (2008).
Variability in the implementation of team decisionmaking (TDM): Scope and compliance with the Family to Family practice model.**

Child and Youth Services Review, 30(11), 1221-1232.

Team decision making is a method of making child welfare placement decisions that draws from the perspectives of family members, community representatives and agency staff members to determine the best placement options for children. Drawing from evidence gathered in a process evaluation of the implementation and dynamics of team decision making approaches in three agencies, this study identifies broad patterns which could potentially be associated with the effect of team decision making on compliance with Family to Family frameworks. The three sites chosen each have different experiences of team decision making implementation: Agency A experienced uneven implementation due to changes in leadership, Agency B had enthusiastic implementation due to strong agency support and Agency C had mature implementation because of a long history of team decision making use. Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques, the evaluation finds that Agency C demonstrated the most positive experiences of child placement in Family to Family settings and diversion away from care but in the absence of a counterfactual comparison, it is difficult to say how much of this is due to team decision making and how much is due to other factors.

Keywords: US; child welfare; child placement; mixed methods; practice development

**Berzin, S. C. (2006).
Using sibling data to understand the impact of family group decision-making on child welfare outcomes.**

Children and Youth Services Review, 28, 1449-1458.

This article examines the impact of family group decision making on child welfare outcomes. Using California's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project Evaluation in Fresno and Riverside Counties, this research used an experimental design, with children randomly assigned to either family group decision making or traditional child welfare services. The researchers used sibling data to bolster the sample size. The outcomes analyzed included child maltreatment, placement stability and permanence, collected from administrative data. The research found no significant difference between the outcomes measured for the treatment (N = 209) and control groups (N = 119).

Keywords: quantitative, experimental design, child welfare, outcomes, siblings, california, united states, placement stability, permanence, child maltreatment, random assignment

Connolly, M. (2006).

Up front and personal: Confronting dynamics in the family group conference.

Family Process, 45(3), 345-357.

This article briefly describes the development and practice of family group conferencing as a family-centered legal process in New Zealand. It then examines the findings of a qualitative study exploring the dynamics emerging from family group conference practice from the perspective of the coordinators who convene them. Coordinators in four focus groups participated in a guided discussion across three broad areas: experiences of coordinating conferences and changes in practice over time; practice issues (e.g., what made conferences go well or poorly); and the coordinators' perceptions of family and non-family participation and influence with respect to the family group conference process. The research indicates that there are benefits in creating a climate of honesty with families, creating the potential for families to deal honestly with the issues. The research indicates that private family time has the potential to promote within-family challenge and self-regulation. The article discusses professional power dynamics and suggests that professional conflicts have the potential to divert attention from family-led processes. It argues that skilled facilitation is needed to ensure that the process is family-led and focused on the child's needs.

Keywords: New Zealand, child welfare, child safety, role of coordinator, qualitative data

Laws, S., & Kirby, P. (2007).

Under the table or at the table: Supporting children and families in family group conferences – a summary of the Daybreak research.

Brighton and Hove Children and Young People's Trust. Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://www.worldwebwise.com/daybreak/docs/Under%20the%20table%20or%20at%20the%20Table%20summary.pdf>

This research was commissioned by the service provider to explore the learning coming from their provision. The evaluation considers the practices of advocates with 10 families who used the family group conferencing service. The family members were interviewed. Within the sample were families that had a professional advocate, families that used a family advocate and a family that refused the offer of an advocate. The research suggests that there is a tension between family advocates (who may be most responsive but may not be impartial) and professional advocates (who can offer neutral support but may disrupt the family time). The report arrives at a series of recommendations for the use and practices of advocates. These include ensuring that the role of the advocate is fully understood and informed consent is obtained, eliciting and supporting the child's views and careful training that includes separating the differing tasks of assessment and advocacy.

Keywords: U.K., United Kingdom, Brighton and Hove, child welfare, child participation, developmental, program evaluation, qualitative case study, qualitative data

**Gunderson, K., Cahn, K., & Wirth, J. (2003).
The Washington State long-term outcome study.**

Protecting Children, 18(1 & 2), 42-47.

This brief article summarizes a long-term outcome evaluation of family group conferences in Washington state. The evaluation involved analysis of administrative data of 70 family group conferences. Conference plans identified the following formal supports: mental health services, substance abuse treatment, behavioral interventions and housing resources. The families also provided a significant amount of support, including transportation, home improvement help, supervised visits, respite care, long-term placements, and financial, emotional and cultural support. In the family group conferences examined, most families identified a placement plan. When comparing the pre-conference and post-conference data, children were more likely to be living with their parents and less likely to be living with other family or nonrelatives after the conference. The children also had stable placement and a low rate of rereferral for abuse or neglect over time.

Keywords: Outcome evaluation, Washington, United States, U.S., quantitative, child welfare, substance abuse, neglect, permanency, placement

**Haresnape, S. (2009).
The use of family group conferences by black minority ethnic communities.**

London: Family Rights Group.

This is a literature review of the dynamics of family group conferencing with black and minority ethnic communities, paying particular attention to the interaction between services and different ethnic groups and highlighting potential barriers to effective engagement. Not strictly an empirical evaluation of the use of family group conferencing with minority groups itself, the review compares recent research evidence from Britain with the original family group conferencing model developed in New Zealand and highlights how family group conferencing could be made more accessible and beneficial for minority communities, particularly in cultural sensitivity. It provides a foundation for the use of future research on the using family group conferencing with British minority communities and indicates issues which need to be taken into account when developing a program for using family group conferencing in this context. The appendices of the review also give structured guidelines on how to implement a successful family group conferencing model when dealing with minority communities.

Keywords: UK; child welfare; black and minority ethnic; literature review

Edwards, L., & Sagatun-Edwards, I. (2007).

The transition to group decision making in child protection cases: Obtaining better results for children and families.

Juvenile and Family Court Journal, 58(1), 1-16.

This article provides a brief overview of the several group decision making models used within the child protection system in Santa Clara County, Calif., including team decision making, family group conferencing, child protection mediation, wraparound services, emancipation conferences and information sharing. The authors put forward three suppositions: 1) decisions made in groups offer more robust judgments for the welfare of children and families, 2) groups including family and community members produce better decisions than groups including only professionals, and 3) a complement of different group decision making models provides better options for use in different circumstances within the child protection field.

Keywords: California; United States; U.S.; child welfare; literature review

Holland, S., Aziz, Q., & Robinson, A. (2007).

The development of an all-Wales evaluation tool for family group conferences: Final research report.

Cardiff, Wales: Cardiff University.

This paper provides a comprehensive map of the family group conference intervention occurring in Wales. It pioneers a way to collect basic conference outcome and output data at a national

level across disparate projects undertaking family group conference intervention. The project consulted stakeholders to design and pilot a questionnaire to collect basic data across an all-Wales family group conference network. As a national picture, the study found that approximately 200 family group conferences occur each year in Wales, and they include an average of 7.5 family members (including two children) and two professionals. In the main, the conferences aimed to address family support issues. One-third aimed to protect children. The study also found that the participants were broadly satisfied with the objectives met during the family group conference, although the data from the six-month follow-up suggested a more measured rate of satisfaction with meeting the conference objectives in the long-term.

Keywords: Wales, United Kingdom, U.K., child welfare, qualitative

Brown, L. (2007).

The adoption and implementation of a service innovation in a social work setting – A case study of family group conferencing in the UK.

Social Policy and Society, 6(3), 321-332.

This article draws on previous research by the author and uses the conceptual framework of innovation in public sector settings to consider the development of family group conferences in the United Kingdom. These prior studies used mixed methods and occurred between 1999 and 2001. The data come from two surveys and a series of case studies of a limited number of local authorities. The key features emerging from this study included the low use of family group conferencing services and the commonality of experience between implementing family group conferences and implementing other innovative approaches in the public sector. The analysis arrives at an understanding of the barriers to using family group conferences. The author suggests that these barriers are connected to the complexity of implementing innovative ideas in a highly proceduralized setting. Ways forward are identified, and these include identifying incentives to change, adopting change management techniques by implementers and taking seriously the resistance that staff concerned with child protection will present, perceiving the use of family group conferences as too risky.

Keywords: U.K., United Kingdom, England, child welfare, child well-being, developmental, program evaluation, qualitative case study, qualitative data, quantitative data

Crow, G., Marsh, P., & Holton, E. (2004).

Supporting pupils, schools and families: An evaluation of the Hampshire Family Group Conferences in Education Project.

Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield and Hampshire County Council.

This report evaluates the work of the Hampshire family group conferences project, exploring its initial implementation and tracing the outcomes of a number of young people in the six to 12 months following their family group conferences. In relation to outcomes, 50 cases were included in the study. In relation to process, the report focused on 37 family group conferences. Interviews were carried out with family members and professionals, with a range of monitoring tools tracking outcomes. The report suggests the process was well-received by families, young people and professionals, with 90 percent of schools and 90 percent of family members saying they would recommend it to others. Positive outcomes for behavioral and attendance problems are identified in over half the cases, including “particularly serious” cases. The report stresses the importance of the work of the coordinator in bringing family members and professionals together in an “open and committed” partnership.

Keywords: U.K., United Kingdom, Hampshire, England, education, delivery system, child well-being, implementation stage, program evaluation, qualitative case study

Sundell, K., Vinnerljung, B., & Ryburn, M. (2001).
Social workers' attitudes towards family group conferences in Sweden and the UK.

Child and Family Social Work, 6, 327-336.

This study examined attitudes of social workers about family group conferencing and compared them with actual numbers of referrals to family group conferencing made by social workers at pilot sites in the United Kingdom and Sweden. Attitudes in Sweden were sampled twice, a year apart, while attitudes in U.K. sites were sampled once. Despite high levels of reported positive attitude toward family group conferencing in both countries, only 42 percent of social workers initiated at least one referral over an 18-month period. The authors speculate that the lack of association between attitudes and referrals may reflect workers' reluctance because they distrust extended family, fear losing control or fear they will be blamed if something goes wrong. The authors caution against explaining workers' reluctance as simply the result of discretionary power or “street level bureaucracy” and encourage more substantive examination of the complex dilemmas and demands made on social workers by the public and their employing organizations.

Keywords: child care; child protection; family group conference; quantitative data; social workers' attitudes; UK; Sweden

Slater, C. M. (2009).
Second chances: Youth justice co-ordinators' perspectives on the youth justice family group conference process.

Doctoral dissertation, University of Auckland. New Zealand. Available from University of Auckland Library, <http://tinyurl.com/2d2ngqu>

This New Zealand study examined the process of youth justice family group conferencing in terms of what was working well and areas for improvement. Interviews were conducted with 19 coordinators who had at least 12 years of practice and 4 focus groups with a total of 27 coordinators who varied in experience. The participants emphasized that the Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act of 1989 provided the philosophical framework that guided practice. They reported that conferencing worked well for the majority of youths but that the approach was often ineffective with recidivist young people who had multiple and complex needs and who needed longer term interventions for themselves and their families. Repeated conferencing with the same young people led to discouragement for the youths, their families and communities. The respondents also identified a number of best practices for family group conferencing in youth justice, including involving the victims in the process and ensuring good preparations. They recommended enhanced training for coordinators, agency leadership and police and better professional communication and collaboration.

Keywords: New Zealand, youth justice, delivery system, implementation stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data

Sieppert, J., & Unrau, Y. (2003).

Revisiting the Calgary project evaluation: A look at children's participation in family group conferencing.

Protecting Children, 18(1 & 2), 113–118.

This brief article re-analyzes children's participation data from an earlier formative evaluation of a pilot family group conference project in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Based on nonparticipant observation with 13 children, the study found children's levels of participation varied greatly between different family group meetings. The authors emphasized that attendance is not equivalent to participation and the meaningful engagement of children in family group conferences and follow-up meetings can meaningfully add to the development of a plan and its monitoring. The study found that some family members and professionals inadvertently mitigated children's participation in the meetings. The authors concluded by suggesting that how children are included in the family group conference process must be better understood and addressed.

Keywords: Alberta, Canada, qualitative data, child participation, process evaluation

Pennell, J. (2006).

Restorative practices and child welfare: Toward an inclusive civil society.

In B. Morrison & E. Ahmed (Eds.), Restorative justice and civil society [Special issue]. *Journal of Social Issues, 62(2), 257-277.*

Given that federal reviews of child welfare in the United States have found that involving families in decision making is related to stabilizing children's placements and promoting children's well-being, a North Carolina study examined the extent to which inclusive participation was achieved at 27 family group conferences held to address child welfare issues. Three indicators of participatory decision making were assessed: 1) greater attendance of family group members than service providers was assumed to reflect a stronger family voice at the deliberations; 2) family group members' satisfaction with the process and outcome was assumed to reflect consensual decision making; and 3) democratic decision processes used during the family private time were assumed to reflect inclusive participation. The study found that all three indicators supported that family group conferencing promotes participatory decision making: 1) the 221 family group members outnumbered the 115 service providers; 2) the family group members were largely satisfied with the conference process and its resulting decision; and 3) the most influential decision processes during the family's private time were consensus, inspiring (following a trusted leader) and bargaining. Far less common were ordering, voting, avoiding and manipulating. Satisfaction with the resulting plan, but not the process, was lowered when bargaining was employed. Conferences with inadequate preparations were more likely to result in manipulation taking place during the family's private time.

Keywords: U.S., North Carolina, child welfare, family participation, developmental stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data, quantitative data

Walton, E., McKenzie, M., & Connolly, M. (2005).
Private family time: The heart of family group conferencing.

Protecting Children, 19(4), 17-24.

This article briefly discusses family group conferencing with particular reference to private family time. It reports on a study that merges data from four care-and-protection coordinator focus groups in New Zealand (N = 29), and a questionnaire that was administered to all coordinators (74 percent response rate, n = 37). The study examined current family group conferencing practices relating to private family time. Findings indicate that coordinators were generally positive about private family time, seeing it as providing an important opportunity for the family to self-regulate and self-monitor. There are also indications that even when the participants in a family group conference cannot reach agreement, it nevertheless can provide healing within a family system. Although family group conferences in New Zealand require that families be provided with private family time, this research indicates that it is not always provided consistently and that there are signs of professional discretion.

Keywords: New Zealand, role of coordinator, child welfare, qualitative data

Backe-Hansen, E. (2006)
Overview of some of the literature about family group conferencing

Overview of some of the literature about family group conferencing Oslo, Norway: NOVA (Norwegian Social Research). Ministry of Education and Research.

This overview provides a brief summary of 25 family group conference-related articles or speeches from various jurisdictions published between 1997 and 2006. The majority of articles includes primary research, but also includes several theoretical articles, one literature review and several speeches. The articles cover a range of topics, largely focused on process evaluation findings. Different uses and forms of family group conferences or group decision making are discussed, such as restorative conferencing in schools and safety conferencing for domestic violence survivors. Most of the evaluation articles include positive satisfaction of participants or positive outcomes, with the exception of a Swedish study, which found little impact of family group conferences in comparison with traditional child protection intervention.

Keywords: annotated bibliography, literature review, process evaluation, outcomes

Sundell, K., & Vinnerljung, B. (2004).

Outcomes of family group conferencing in Sweden: A 3-year follow-up.

Child Abuse & Neglect, 28, 267-287.

This article reports on an evaluation of an early trial of family group conferences in 10 local authorities across Sweden. A comparison was undertaken between children involved in family group conferences (N = 97) and a random sample of children receiving traditional child welfare services (N = 142), following them over a three-year period, post-conference. At the three-year follow-up, 69 percent of the family group conferencing group had been the subject of at least one new child maltreatment report and 60 percent were substantiated. Out of 57 percent of the comparison group with at least one new report, 40 percent were substantiated. Both groups had low levels of rereporting by extended family members (11 percent). On average, the family group conferencing children received more services and were more often placed in foster or residential care. They also had more previous child protection investigations than did the nonconference group (71 percent versus 51 percent) and social workers rated the family group conferencing cases as more serious than the comparison group. Data analysis found that during the follow-up period, social background and problems had a significant effect on continued child protection contact. Further, the model of family group conferencing as compared to conventional child protection interventions had a significant effect on continued child protection involvement but accounted for only a small part of the variance, from 0 to 7 percent. In terms of the process, the family group conferences were well-attended by family members (75 percent) and children's participation in the conferences was high, with 41 percent of children 9 years and younger and 94 percent of children over 10 years participating. The children reported that their views were respected (77 percent), expressed satisfaction with the plan (89 percent), and preferred family group conferencing as an effective solution-focused method (86 percent).

Keywords: Sweden, child welfare, child safety, outcome evaluation, quantitative data, quasi-experimental design

Marsh, P., & Walsh, D. (2007, January).

Outcomes of family group conferences: More than just the plan?

Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://www.kent.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/9C8F2763-5B80-4F00-B9A2-602DE5AF1DAE/11750/fgcresearchreport.pdf>

This local evaluation report maps the perceived and desired outcomes of a family group conference service against the “Every Child Matters” overarching outcomes framework for children’s services in the United Kingdom. In addition, it compares the predicted and perceived outcomes of 23 family group conferences, as identified by the family groups and various professionals. The report suggests that families and professionals all perceived “a remarkable degree of successful outcome,” with “remarkably similar” judgments as to the extent of effectiveness. However, it also suggests that around one in three of the actions agreed on for services were not carried out. To address this, the authors suggest a need for greater review of plans during the plan implementation period. In particular, they argue a need for the family to review plans and to potentially lead this review. Such a process would support the adoption of the principles of the family group conference within the plan implementation period, including “the commitment to partnership working not just to partnership based decision-making.”

Keywords: U.K., United Kingdom, Kent, child welfare, child well-being, delivery system, implementation stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data

Titcomb, A., & LeCroy, C. (2005).

Outcomes of Arizona’s family group decision making program.

Protecting Children, 19(4), 47-53.

This article provides a very brief overview of a three-year process-and-outcomes evaluation for the family group decision making program in Arizona. The evaluation found more positive outcomes for children and families who were involved in the program than those in the comparison group during the six-month following period. Although a similar trend was found after one year, it was not statistically significant. The evaluation found children whose families had been involved in family group decision making had decreased rates of resubstantiation (in the six months following the meeting) and families were more actively involved in decision making. Families involved in the program expressed high rates of satisfaction in the process and those involved in the meetings expressed high levels of confidence in the child’s safety subsequent to the meeting.

Keywords: Arizona, United States, U.S., process evaluation, outcome evaluation, child placement, child welfare, child safety

**Holland, S., O'Neill, S., Scourfield, J., & Pithouse, A. (2004).
Outcomes in family group conferences for children on the brink of care: A study of child
and family participation: Final report.**

Cardiff, Wales: Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences.

This study reports findings from a small but in-depth qualitative study of family group conferencing in Wales. The research presents findings on the general process of the family group conference and, in particular, explores the role of the child in the process. Twenty-five children and young people were interviewed within one month of their conferences and were re-interviewed six months later. Participating adult family members, social workers and coordinators were also interviewed, and 96 interviews were undertaken overall. The authors suggest that the family group conference provides the potential to democratize family decision making, reducing power differences between professionals and family and within families. The research, however, found that in a number of ways, professionals in practice retained some control over the decision-making process and that there was a demand for this from families. Interestingly, the study found that the use of private family time had a mixed response from families – half indicated they would prefer a professional remained throughout the entire meeting. Positively, men attended the conferences, and most children felt they had a say during the meeting. Some children, however, felt disempowered by family arguments during the conference, and a small number felt they were not heard. The authors suggest that the family group conference, while having a critical role in the making of practical decisions, has emotional and even therapeutic benefits as it provides an appropriate platform for the confrontation of issues. They note that issues of confidentiality and disclosures require careful planning by the facilitators. Overall, almost all family members preferred the family group conference to other social service meetings they had experienced. The report provides the source data for a set of further articles that explore particular aspects of the family group conference (see Holland & O'Neill, 2006; Holland & Rivett, 2008; and Holland, Scourfield, O'Neill, & Pithouse, 2005).

Keywords: United Kingdom, U.K., Wales, child participation, child welfare, qualitative

**Sawyer, R. Q., & Lohrbach, S. (2008, January).
Olmsted County Child and Family Services: Family involvement strategies.**

Rochester, MN: Olmsted County Child and Family Services.

Drawing on multi-year (1996-2007) secondary statistics and survey results (2004-2006), the authors associate the increased use of a range of family involvement strategies with a variety of positive outcomes, including reduced use of court, timely case resolution, increased use of kin and family placements, reduction in new findings of abuse and neglect, and positive safety outcomes.

Keywords: United States, U.S., Minnesota, Olmsted County, child welfare, child safety, quantitative data, qualitative data, developmental stage, pre/post-comparisons

Weisz, V., Korpas, A., & Wingrove, T. (2006).
Nebraska family group conferencing: Evaluation report.

Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, UN-L Center on Children, Families, and the Law, Nebraska Court Improvement Project.

This report presents the results from four evaluations of Nebraska's use of family group conferencing, including separate process evaluations for child abuse and neglect and for status offense and delinquency cases, an assessment of relationships between family group conferencing characteristics and participant perceptions, and an outcome evaluation for the use of expedited family group conferences in situations of child abuse and neglect. The use of expedited family group conferencing grew out of the project's three-year experience and was initiated for situations involving a child's removal from home. Referrals for expedited conferences were expected to be made immediately after the removal and were to occur within one week but no longer than 30 days from the removal. Expedited conferences aimed to focus on the immediate placement of the child but avoid addressing allegations of abuse or neglect because allegations had typically not been adjudicated. Both regular and expedited family group conferences averaged about eight family members in attendance and received overall high levels of reported satisfaction from professionals and family, including young people. Somewhat lower satisfaction, but not statistically significant, was reported by families who had family group conferences in cases associated with neglect, where there were larger numbers of people at the meeting, including other family, and in meetings that lasted longer. Similarly, lower satisfaction (not statistically significant) was reported by attorneys in attendance in cases involving sexual abuse. Outcome evaluation showed that there was no difference between expedited family group conferences and a comparison group in time before discharge from the system. There were, however, significant differences in where children were placed. At the time of the follow-up, children whose family conference occurred within 30 days (for abuse and neglect cases) were more likely to be living with relatives or be back with their parents than were children in a randomly selected comparison group of non-family group conference children.

Keywords: expedited family group conferences; quasiexperimental design; child protection; qualitative and quantitative data; US

Duke University, Center for Child and Family Policy, Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy. (2006, June).
Multiple response system (MRS) evaluation report to the North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS).

Durham, NC: Author. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/d6/3a.pdf

This report concludes that overall, the multiple response system in North Carolina does not compromise the safety of children served by child welfare. Specifically, with reference to child and family teams, the multiple response system was found to be supported by carefully developed policy and training, but its delivery by the pilot counties was uneven. The study stresses the importance of child and family teams for the multiple response system: “The formation and utilization of a Child and Family Team (CFT) after case decision is at the core of MRS redesign of case planning and management” (p. 35). In a summary of their conclusions, though, they observed that “MRS pilot counties varied in the extent of implementation of this strategy as documented in the case files” (p. 6). This study identified some challenges to child and family team implementation: the reluctance of parents or caregivers to involve others in their family affairs, professionals outnumbering family as participants, and difficulties in convening meetings because of the different schedules of family, workers and community service providers. To advance child and family team practice, this report makes a series of recommendations. These include that the North Carolina Division of Social Services needs to specify “clear and measurable indicators for the full spectrum of activities for Child and Family Teams,” designate “best practice for the use of external facilitators for Child and Family Team meetings,” “develop standardized forms to document and track progress for MRS strategies, including forms for Child and Family Team meetings,” and “support the value of more training for both staff and supervisors on specific MRS strategies” (pp. 47-48).

Keywords: United States, U.S., North Carolina, child welfare, delivery system, developmental stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data

Harris, N. (2007).

Mapping the adoption of family group conferencing in Australian states and territories.

Adelaide, Australia: Australian Centre for Child Protection. Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection/documents/FGCharrisN.pdf>

This paper draws on a literature review of articles and studies carried out in Australia through 2006 and from 18 interviews conducted with managers or conference facilitators from states across the country. While the New Zealand model is used and adhered to in places, the author reports that the use of family group conferencing in Australia varies. Family group conferencing is not offered routinely to families and varies in the power given to families to make decisions (e.g., in some jurisdictions the plan can be amended and in others, the statutory child welfare workers are not obliged to implement the plan). The author concludes that overall, family group conferences in Australia serve a different function than in New Zealand, where they occur within child protection structures. Australia’s implementation is seen to “fall far short of the systematic empowerment of families that has been envisaged in New Zealand” (p. 28).

Keywords: Australia; literature review; developmental stage

**Staples, J. (2007).
Knowle West Family Group Conference Project: Evaluation report.**

Bristol, England: Barnardo's/Knowle West Neighborhood Renewal

This report looks at the experiences of those participating in family group conferences delivered by the commissioners of the report, during 2005 to 2007. Participants who gave consent were interviewed by telephone post-conference; there were some 70 respondents. The evaluation captured data from the original referral and then set the later outcomes against the original referral data. The evaluation sought to arrive at both findings about the effect of the service and recommendations for service development. Respondents positively rated the service and a majority said that their situation had improved following the family group conference. The respondents cited improved family relationships and improved home-school relationships as outcomes, alongside predicative commentaries that suggested that the family group conference prevented further breakdown of the family situation. Unanticipated outcomes included the surprise of professionals at the capacity within the family for support, enhanced self-esteem of participants and increased knowledge within and about the family.

Keywords: U.K., United Kingdom, Knowle, child welfare, child well-being, delivery system, implementation stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data

Duke University, Center for Child and Family Policy, Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy. (2007, September).

Improving child welfare outcomes through system of care: Family centered meeting survey report 2005-2006

Alamance, Bladen, and Mecklenburg Counties, North Carolina. Durham, NC: Author.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of system of care and multiple response system principles in four types of family-centered meetings: 1) child and family teams (required for high- and intensive-risk cases to engage families in service planning); 2) team decision making (used to make placement decisions); 3) permanency planning action teams (legally required for cases in which a child is in the custody of social services, in order to demonstrate a reasonable effort for ensuring a safe, permanent home for the child); and 4) shared parenting meetings (required to connect biological and foster parents early in foster placements). The counties that participated were Alamance, Bladen and Mecklenburg. Surveys were given out at meetings with a facilitator present and cases with a rating of high or intensive risk. However, surveys were not given at every meeting that was facilitated. Facilitators completed a meeting summary form at the start of the meeting, which includes meeting type and who did and did not attend. Facilitators gave surveys to each person present at the meeting, when the meeting was finished. Facilitators also provided information on meeting length. In 2005 and 2006, participants reported agreement on the four scales regarding child and family teams and team decision making: 1) the fidelity of the process; 2) feeling engaged in the process; 3) seeing the goals as being met; and 4) participants' understanding of their roles. With some exception,

ratings on these scales tended to improve from 2005 to 2006. Child and family team meetings tended to have higher model fidelity ratings than permanency planning action team meetings. In both years studied, parents gave significantly higher ratings for “participation” at child and family teams than at team decision making meetings, but in the second year, foster parents rated their satisfaction significantly higher in team decision making meetings than in child and family teams. Longer meetings were associated with lower ratings. Participants suggested that meetings could be improved by better attendance of parents and other team members, more preparation of participants, and making other arrangements, such as providing snacks and child care.

Keywords: United States, U.S., North Carolina, child welfare, service delivery, developmental stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data, quantitative data

**Northwest Institute for Children and Families, & Catalyst for Kids. (2007, May).
Finding our roots: Family group conferencing in Washington.**

Seattle, WA: Author.

The Finding Our Roots program gave family group conferences to children ages 10-18, as well as quarterly permanency team meetings. The study gave priority to children of color, as they are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. For instance, 8 percent of the children in King County, Wash., are African-American or Native American, but they make up 33 percent of children removed from their homes. The 550 meetings held averaged 9.8 participants, with greater participation from the maternal family. Service provider attendance averaged at 3.5 per meeting. Through the conferences, nearly all children and youth gained closer and more positive relationships with their families and communities and an increase in supports.

Keywords: United States, U.S., Washington, child welfare, child permanency, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data

**Connolly, M. (2006).
Fifteen years of family group conferencing: Coordinators talk about their experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand.**

British Journal of Social Work, 36(4), 523-540.

This article represents a small qualitative study examining the experiences of care and protection coordinators who have been convening family group conferences since the early years of the New Zealand legislation. It explores early perceptions of the legislation, what first attracted the coordinators to the role and what keeps them in the job. In particular, the study explores the practice tensions that rest within family-centered child protection models, and the ways in which family group conferencing practice has developed in response to modern imperatives, including fiscal pressures. It found that small and subtle changes in practice can shift the emphasis from

family-led to more professionally-driven processes. The author also notes the tensions that can exist when managing the family support and child protection functions of a family group conference. The study reinforces the importance of providing professional staff with both an early training foundation and ongoing training to best facilitate strengths-based policy and law.

Keywords: child welfare, role of coordinator, qualitative, New Zealand

Thomas, K. L., Berzin, S. C., & Cohen, E. (2005).

Fidelity of family group decision making: A content analysis of family conference and case plans in a randomized treatment study.

Protecting Children, 19(4), 4-15.

This article reports on a substudy of case plans from a randomized assignment of cases to family group decision making approaches in two California counties between April 2000 and October 2002 and compares the conference plans from those meetings between counties and to one county's sample of case plans developed through traditional case planning mechanisms. The two counties' use of family group decision making was thought to be comparable because they each took a slightly different focus on the use of family group decision making, with one using private family time and the other emphasizing professional facilitation of discussions throughout the meeting. A content analysis of the plans addresses the extent to which the plans developed through family group decision making processes reflected family group decision making values, examines the differences between the two counties and compares these conference plans with case plans developed through other means. Starting with the categories of the language used in the plans, the roles of participants in plan activities, identified methods for carrying out the activities in the plans and references to the family's religious or cultural heritage in the plans, and refining them as they went on, the researchers report important differences between the plans in the two sites and differences between plans developed through family group decision making and those developed through traditional case plans. They report that conference plans captured many of the goals and philosophies of family group decision making and traditional case plans did not, even though social workers in both places had been trained in family group decision making philosophies. While conference plans relied more heavily on professional case management solutions at the one site than at the other, the family group decision making plans at both sites indicated greater mobilization of family, community and nonprofessional resources than did the traditional case plans. The authors offer a number of reasons why case plans are more dominated by professional influence, including that the case planning methods themselves do not incorporate family engagement values and principles, the case plan reporting format in each county lent itself to "cookie cutter" text instead of the type of language that families use to make plans, the possibility that workers' interpretation of confidentiality policies may limit their inclusion of extended family and workers are simply unable to exert the kind of effort that holding a family meeting generates because they have too many constraints on their time and energy.

Keywords: US; randomized control trial; qualitative case study; case plans

Kemp, T. (2007).

Family welfare conferences – the Wexford experience: An evaluation of Barnardos family welfare conference project.

Ballincollig, Republic of Ireland: Nucleus.

This report draws from a literature review and semi-structured interviews with professionals and family members associated with family welfare conferences that took place in County Wexford, Republic of Ireland, between 2003 and 2005. The author explores specific operational and managerial features, the practices and processes, and the themes that emerged from project outcomes in this research and in two administrative reports previously prepared for the project. This report is a rich source of information about the pilot project. The author calls attention to the challenges of isolating the sole effect of a meeting even in the face of highly positive reports of the experiences of most people involved and the clear role the meetings play in creating a climate for improved relationships and related matters. A detailed audit of emerging themes, observations and recommendations is offered. This report is the product of an in-depth reflection of the views and observations of a wide range of stakeholders in the project.

Keywords: Republic of Ireland, Ireland, Wexford, literature review, interviews, process evaluation, qualitative, implementation stage

Edwards, M., Tinworth, K., Burford, G., & Pennell, J. (2007, March).

Family team meeting (FTM) process, outcome, and impact evaluation phase II report.

Englewood, CO: American Humane Association.

This evaluation of the Family Team Meeting Program at the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency focuses on the use of family meetings to rapidly mobilize the family group at the time a child enters placement. Of the 649 children entering foster care between Jan. 1, 2005, and Sept. 30, 2005, 70 percent were members of a family participating in a family team meeting. Using a pre-post design, two comparison groups and interviews, the study reports significant increases in the rate of foster care placements with relative families and significantly higher rates of reunification at discharge for children whose families participated in a family meeting, as compared to children whose families did not. Moreover, no differences in safety, as measured by recurrence of substantiated maltreatment, were found between children whose families participated and those who did not. Stakeholder interviews replicated the findings of the first year evaluation by affirming the value of family meetings and stating that parent rights were being protected. Supporting the latter assertion, no parental appeals of hearing results had been lodged and upheld. Interviewees overwhelmingly endorsed principles of family engagement through family team meetings. The researchers note that after the family plan has been developed, concerns remain about the ongoing engagement and participation of family and

community members in implementing and revising the plan and concerns about the extent to which the plan informs the ongoing service plan.

Keywords: U.S., Washington, D.C., child permanency, child placement, child safety, delivery system, developmental stage, outcome evaluation, quasi-experimental design, quantitative data

Pennell, J., & Burford, G. (2000)

Family group decision making: Protecting children and women.

Child Welfare, 79(2), 131-158.

This study of family group conferencing in Newfoundland and Labrador was conducted in 1993-1996, in three culturally diverse regions: Inuit, rural and capital city. Over an approximately one-year period, family group conferences were convened for 32 families, with 472 participants at their conferences, of whom, 384 were family group members and 88 were service providers. An average of one year after their conferences, 115 out of the 384 family group members were interviewed. Whether the plans were completed in their entirety or in part, the majority of the interviewees reported that the family was better off because of the family group conference. In particular, interviewees thought the family was better off because the conference strengthened positive relationships and enhanced their sense of being family. In addition, interviewees reported that children from the project families suffered less maltreatment and had better parenting. A review of child welfare files found a reduction in indicators of child maltreatment and domestic violence for the 32 project families and a moderate increase for the 31 comparison families. After the conference, child protection workers were less likely to make emergency visits to project families than to comparison families because they knew the project families better. The number of child placements stayed relatively constant for the comparison families and fell for the project families. Small in number but nevertheless troubling, children and youth abusing mothers appeared to persist for project families and rose for comparison families. Mother abuse was linked with child self-harm (i.e., self-mutilation and attempted suicide) for both groups. Family group conferencing plans became quickly dated in especially chaotic family situations.

Keywords: Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador, child welfare, domestic violence, family violence, developmental stage, program evaluation, quasi-experimental design, qualitative data, quantitative data

Weigensberg, E. C., Barth, R. P., & Guo, S. (in press).

Family group decision making: A propensity score analysis to evaluate child and family services at baseline and after 36-months.

Children and Youth Services Review.

This study draws on data from a national survey in the United States (National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being) to evaluate the impact of family meetings on services for children and their families. The survey does not differentiate between meeting types, and accordingly, uses family group decision making as a generic term to encompass various models of family involvement. The database consisted of 36 months of data, representing 3,220 children referred because of child maltreatment and living at home during the initial interview. Within this sample, a subgroup of 325 children had received a family meeting during the initial placement or planning assessment process. To construct a comparison group of non-family-group-decision-making cases, the authors used propensity score matching to mitigate the influence of possible selection bias. The analysis reveals that a significantly higher percentage of cases which had experienced a family group decision making meeting were initially connected with some services, in particular, parenting services, children's counseling services and mental health treatment for parents. After 36 months, the differences between the comparison groups had faded and were no longer statistically significant. While the authors acknowledge what appears to be a positive "boost" on the front end, they caution interpretation of the findings at 36 months as there is no indication in the database about whether the family meeting was a one-time event or if professionals remained engaged with families.

Keywords: United States, U.S., child welfare, family participation, delivery system, child well-being, developmental stage, outcome evaluation, quasi-experimental design, quantitative data

**Kiely, P., & Bussey, K. (2001).
Family group conferencing: A longitudinal evaluation.**

Sydney, Australia: Macquarie University.

This longitudinal study from New South Wales, Australia, reports the outcomes for children and families three and a half years, on average, after they had participated in a family group conference. The group was compared with a sample of similar families who were subject to traditional case planning procedures. Statutory service files for the 30 randomly selected families which comprised the two groups were analyzed and coded for both qualitative and quantitative data that included family characteristics, risk factors, types of abuse and outcomes for both groups. Compared with traditional case planning methods, results from family group conferences generate additional kinship foster care and respite for children of families reported for abuse and neglect. Younger children were more likely to benefit from this support. Extended family support was not found to reduce the need for community support, especially for youths 12 years and older. Reduction of reports to statutory service post-conference was taken as evidence that welfare and safety of children were not compromised by family group conferencing. Outcomes for youth entering their teen years were the least successful in the study. The family group conferencing model is seen as being dependent on the availability and consistency of suitable and easily accessible resources from both the family and community through these teens' most challenging circumstances.

Keywords: Australia, quasi-experimental design, child welfare, child safety, quantitative and qualitative, outcome study

Desmeules, G. H. (2003).

Family group conferencing: A decolonization journey for aboriginal children and families in child protection services.

Unpublished master's thesis, Royal Roads University, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

This Canadian thesis is based on a qualitative, participatory action study which aimed to deepen and improve family group conferencing partnerships and ensure a cultural fit of the family group conferencing model for aboriginal children and families involved in the child welfare system for one tribe in British Columbia. The author directly observed one conference and facilitated another. Other methods included ongoing consultation with members of a collaborative group, a survey of four social workers, phone interviews with six conference participants, and an all-day focus group and sharing circle of 13 members. Recommendations included 1) changing the name of family group conferencing to include a more traditional circle; 2) integrating the stages of family group conferencing with healing; and 3) forming an aboriginal relations committee to develop a more culturally appropriate partnership and accommodate a matriarchal system into the family group conference model and ongoing collaborative learning.

Keywords: Canada, Alberta, indigenous, aboriginal, child welfare, process evaluation, child permanency, implementation stage

Koch, M., Hilt, L., Jenkins, L., & Dunn, T. (2006, November).

Family group conferencing: 45 children a 12 month study.

Presentation at the World Forum: Future Directions in Child Welfare, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

These study results are summarized in a slide presentation; no written report was prepared. This study involved case file analysis, family group conference coordinator feedback, information technology tracking of new intakes and data on legal status of children, placements of children and whether the files were open or closed. A thematic review of families' plans was carried out to analyze what family supports were included. Forty-five children of 24 families who participated in family group conferences between April 1, 2004, and March 31, 2005, were included. The presenters reported post-conference increases in the number of children living with their family of origin, the number of aboriginal children living in their communities and being served by aboriginal agencies, and increases in participation of extended family and community members in planning for at-risk children and implementing plans, connection with family and extended family, connection or reconnection with community cultures and practices, paternal family involvement and active and meaningful participation of children. The presenters also

report decreases in adversarial environments among the family and professionals involved and costs for children in care.

Keywords: Canada, British Columbia, child welfare, qualitative, quantitative, indigenous, aboriginal, cost analysis

Helland, J. (2005, October).
Family group conferencing literature review.

Victoria, British Columbia, Canada: University of Victoria, International Institute for Child Rights and Development.

This literature review was prepared for the Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia. The author organizes the review around descriptions and applications of family group conferencing; literature that reports the experiences of children, youth, families, social workers and other stakeholders; and process and planning outcomes.

Keywords: Columbia; child welfare; literature review

Harris, N. (2008).
Family group conferencing in Australia 15 years on (Child Abuse Prevention Issue, No. 27).

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

This article is a synopsis of a 2007 report by the same author that mapped the adoption of conferencing in child protection systems across Australia. Developed from a 2005 workshop sponsored by the Australian Centre for Child Protection, it provides a comparison of the implementation and use of conferencing in Australian states and territories and discusses the implementation of conferencing in Australia relative to the approach as developed in New Zealand. The article makes implications for ways that conferences can better contribute to broader child protection goals.

Keywords: review, Australia, child welfare

Huntsman, L. (2006).
Family group conferencing in a child welfare context.

Ashfield, New South Wales, Australia: Centre for Parenting & Research, Funding & Business Analysis Division NSW Department of Community Services.

The author organizes this detailed literature review around history of family group conferencing; variations on the approach; suitability of family group conferencing for culturally diverse and indigenous communities; roles and attitudes of participants, including family, children, young people and professionals; the effectiveness of family group conferencing; implications for policy and practice; and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Australia; child welfare; indigenous; literature review

Sundell, K. (2003).

Family group conferences in Sweden -- continuing social services programs for children and parents [English Summary].

Retrieved December 9, 2008, from

<http://www.sos.se/socialtj/cus/cuse/empstude/famrad99sum.htm>

This summary from Sweden's National Board of Health and Welfare reports on an evaluation of an early trial of family group conferences in 10 local authorities across Sweden, later published by Sundell and Vinnerljung (2004). The summary reports a comparison between children involved in family group conferences (N = 97) and a random sample of children receiving traditional child welfare services (N = 142), following them over a three-year period, post-conference. Children receiving a family group conference were somewhat more frequently rereferred for suspected abuse, but neglect rereferrals were the same for both groups of children. More of the family group conference children were placed with kin, but the majority was nevertheless placed in nonrelative care (79 percent). The children receiving a conference were somewhat more frequently continuing to receive interventions after three years, but interventions more frequently progressed from placements to noncustodial care. The researcher suggests that the type of model applied (i.e., family group conference or conventional models) minimally explained the variance in outcome measurement. The author recognizes both the limitations of the research methodology and the challenges faced by child welfare in resolving issues of child maltreatment. In regards to the quasi-experimental design, Sundell identifies significant difficulties in determining the impact of family group conferencing as the analysis may not have adequately controlled for the conference referrals having more indicators for child maltreatment than the comparison groups. Poor follow-through of the conference plans was also identified as a possible explanation for the results. Overall, the author points to the challenges confronting child welfare in supporting good outcomes for children, noting that the children receiving traditional interventions in the study (the comparison group) demonstrated limited success.

Keywords: Sweden, child welfare, child safety, quasi-experimental design, outcome evaluation, quantitative data

Hayden, C. (2004).

Family group conferences in education- evaluating outcomes: Executive summary.

Portsmouth, England: University of Portsmouth, Institute of Criminal Justice Studies.

The Hampshire Family Group Conferences in Education project in England provides family-led decision making meetings for children and young people with significant problems in school and school attendance. This executive summary reports on a quasi-experimental study. The study involved 41 young people who received family group conferences and 37 young people who received traditional intervention in 2003. Key informants for the study said family group conferences offered a positive way to address problems in schools. The study found an increased “normality” in young people’s behavior and a sense of reduced “burden” for parents and teachers where family group conferences were convened. The study also found that the control group had better results for school attendance. However, the results need to be tempered since the conference group illustrated more overall problematic behavior than the control group both before and after the conference. The author suggests that family group conferences may not be more effective than other services but may be more appropriate in certain circumstances.

Keywords: outcome evaluation, pre/post-comparison, education, Hampshire, United Kingdom, U.K., England, quasi-experimental

Barn, R., Das, C., Sawyerr, A. (2009, April)

Family group conferences and black and minority ethnic families: An evaluation study of two community-based organisations in London.

Family group conferences and black and minority ethnic families: An evaluation study of two community-based organisations in London. London: Family Rights Group.

This report presents the summary findings of an evaluation of a project between the Family Rights Group and two community-based organizations working with black and minority ethnic groups in London: Hopscotch, Camden, and Claudia Jones, Hackney. The project sought to examine why family group conferencing had such a low use among minority families and how this could be improved. A research team from Royal Holloway, University of London was commissioned to evaluate the merits and difficulties of using community-based organizations to run family group conferences among different minority communities and to consider wider good practice across the country. The evaluation used a combination of existing data available to the projects (i.e., family profiles) and evidence from interviews with family members, a detailed questionnaire for families in family group conferences, interviews with coordinators and staff from both projects, focus-group discussions with London-wide family group conference coordinators and managers, and observation of the family group conferencing process. Findings from the research were then divided and analyzed from the perspective of families and practitioners. Overall, the findings suggest that embedding family group conferencing in social services could be very beneficial for minority families, but the availability of sufficient financial and human resources for implementing and coordinating family group conferences cannot be underestimated.

Keywords: UK; child welfare; black and minority ethnic; evaluation; mixed methods

Brodie, K. A. (2008).

Family group conference: An exploratory study describing the relationship between an internal agency environment and the process.

Doctoral dissertation, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

This retrospective study of one California county's child welfare services examined the internal agency factors promoting and inhibiting family group conferencing and the reasons for the program's discontinuation after eight years of operation. The independent variable, the internal agency environment, included agency resources, supervisor expectations, worker attitudes and beliefs, and caseload responsibilities. The dependent variable, family group conferencing, encompassed conference referrals, coordination (preparation), facilitation and follow-up. Sixty-six child protection staff members who had worked at the agency during the years of family group conferencing implementation were surveyed and more in-depth interviews were conducted with seven staff members. The study reported moderately positive and statistically significant (at .05 or higher) relationships between aspects of the internal agency environment and the family group conferencing process. The strongest relationships were between agency resources and facilitation, supervisor expectations and coordination, and social worker attitudes and facilitation and coordination. Unexpectedly, caseload responsibilities did not relate significantly to the family group conferencing process. During the interviews, staff identified factors impeding family group conferencing delivery in a public child welfare agency: operating in crisis mode, pragmatically using any method that appeared to work and some parents refusing to include relatives in decision making. They attributed the program's discontinuation to changes in funding and state and federal mandates leading to changes in agency management. Family group conferencing was replaced by another model called team decision making, which was seen as less costly in resources and more rapidly responsive to emergencies. Overall, the interviewees characterized family group conferencing, especially private family time, as empowering families to make better decisions about their children.

Keywords: California, US; child welfare; delivery system; program evaluation; process evaluation; qualitative data; quantitative data

O'Sullivan, B., McKinney, A., & Gallagher, S. (2002).

Family group conference pilot project.

Belfast, Northern Ireland: North Western Health Board.

This evaluation of an Irish pilot project assesses the applicability of family group conferencing as a partnership-based model to promote and enhance child-centered and family-focused practice. The authors were particularly interested in assessing what modifications to the family group conferencing model were necessary for application in their region. The evaluation draws on cross-sectional postal questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews with family

members, children and professionals who participated in the first six of 10 family welfare conferences. High levels of satisfaction are reported from family and professionals about the experience, including the plans for the children, the provision of information to the family, the degree to which the meetings were child-focused and the fit between the practice principles and other services employing partnership and inclusive practices.

Keywords: Republic of Ireland, Ireland, qualitative, quantitative, process evaluation, implementation stage

Horwitz, M. (2008).

Family conferencing as core child protection practice.

Unpublished manuscript.

The Connecticut state child protection services agency has adopted a family conferencing program designed to increase both family engagement in case planning and kin involvement in planning for and supporting families. The program integrates family conferencing into core practice by requiring all child protection workers to make efforts to convene and facilitate conferences for families on their regular caseloads. This study analyzes data from 2,076 family conferences held during 2006-2007. The most common reason for convening conferences was to support child placements with parents or kin, underscoring the role of these meetings in reducing stranger foster care. The majority of conferences (88 percent) resulted in kin agreements to help parents and children, with emotional support (75 percent), transportation (44 percent), emergency respite (35 percent) and providing a home to a child (32 percent). When more parents and kin attended the meetings, there were more offers of help, longer meetings and more placement offers; and longer meetings were positively associated with more kin offering to assist a family. These associations suggest that it is useful to work toward maximum attendance at family conferences and to allow adequate time for the meetings. For more information on this manuscript, please contact the author at mhorwitz@crocker.com.

Keywords: United States, U.S., Connecticut, child welfare, child protective services, child placement, family participation, family conference, implementation stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, quantitative data

Ministry of Children and Family Development, Vancouver Coastal Region, Collaborative Practice Team. (2008, April).

Family case planning conferencing: Pilot project evaluation.

Victoria, British Columbia, Canada: Ministry of Children and Family Development.

This exploratory study reports administrative data and qualitative analysis of focus groups and case files associated with a six-month use of family case planning conferencing (FCPC) in the

Vancouver Coastal Region of British Columbia, Canada. The conferences were modeled on Olmsted County, Minnesota's use of FCPC. Thirty-one conferences were held. The authors recommended the continued use of FCPC as a useful option between the more professionally driven integrated case management meetings and the more family-led family group conferences. The approach is recommended as particularly useful in intake and other situations that operate on tight timelines.

Keywords: Canada, British Columbia, indigenous, child welfare, qualitative, quantitative

Brady, B. (2006, October).

Facilitating family decision making: A study of the family welfare conference service in the HSE Western Area.

Galway, Ireland: National University of Ireland, Department of Political Science and Health Service Executive, Child & Family Research and Policy Unit. Retrieved December 2, 2008, from http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/documents/fwc_final_report.pdf

This document is a compendium of three reports completed as part of an overall study of the Family Welfare Conference Service in the Health Service Executive Western Area for Counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon in the Republic of Ireland. It includes a literature review, an implementation report and an evaluation report. The literature review outlines the origins of the family group conference/family welfare conference model and describes its key features, principles and theoretical basis. The author identifies from the international literature a set of issues including the legal basis for family group conferencing, the degree to which empowerment principles of family group conferencing can be realized within a bureaucratic system and the role of family group conferencing in child protection case conferences. The implementation report describes the early development of the family welfare conference service in the region and outlines relevant administrative statistics up to the end of August 2004, including the number of referrals, conferences and reviews; referral sources and reasons; numbers and ages of children involved; costs of conferences; average time for coordination; conference venues; and other relevant process information. The evaluation report focuses on the perspectives of key stakeholders including family members, referrers, coordinators and senior personnel of childcare services. Themes explored include perceived outcomes and benefits of the service, the role and place of the family welfare conferencing service in the child care system and process and practice issues arising in the implementation. Recommendations are given for future development of the service. The consensus among stakeholders is that the model is most effective in early intervention, and while there is a broad openness to the model's use in child protection and alternative care cases, core staff feel that it is currently under-used in these arenas.

Keywords: Republic of Ireland, Ireland, Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, literature review, implementation stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, cost analysis

**Pennell, J., Edwards, M., & Burford, G. (2010).
Expedited family group engagement and child permanency.**

Children and Youth Services Review, 32(7), 1012-1019.

This study in Washington, D.C., evaluated the impact of family team meetings on children's permanency. The meetings were convened within 72 hours after an emergency removal to give the family group the opportunity for input into the plan while still ensuring due process for parents in court. This program commenced in January 2005, making it possible to compare the outcomes for the 454 children who had a family team meeting with those of the 140 children from the period just before start-up and with the 195 children who did not receive a family team meeting after start-up. The children in the three groups were similar in terms of age, sex, race and ethnicity, but the family team meeting group had a lower rate of diagnosed disabilities. In terms of the reason for entering care, the three groups were also similar on rates of neglect or sexual abuse, but the family team meeting group had a greater likelihood of physical abuse. Using data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, a number of statistically significant differences in outcomes were found. The family team meeting children were more likely to be placed in relative foster care, have family-group-type permanency goals in their case plans (e.g., reunify with parents or live with relatives), have shorter stays in care and be discharged to their parents or kin.

Keywords: Washington, D.C; USA; child welfare; child permanency; developmental stage; program evaluation; quasiexperimental design; quantitative

**Barnsdale, L., & Walker, M. (2007, March).
Examining the use and impact of family group conferencing.**

Edinburgh, Scotland: University of Stirling, Social Work Research Centre.

This review of research and practice in family group conferencing is composed of two distinct but complementary parts: a review of the international literature and a qualitative study of the views and experiences of 28 service providers and academics within the United Kingdom. The review locates current U.K. practice in a historical and international context and places practitioner experience and insight within lessons emerging from research, finding corresponding views from both sources. The study reviews the evidence of the effectiveness of family group conferencing, concluding that while it is clear that the process promotes family and child participation, there is less evidence of plan implementation and long-term positive outcomes for children. The review ends with a series of recommendations for the development of family group conferencing in Scotland, linking these to current policy drivers for change in children's services. It supports the development of family group conferencing in Scotland, recommending that attention be paid to the "fit" between family group conferencing and current core service provision. It advocates that a number of small, well-designed projects be funded to undertake both process and long-term outcome evaluation.

Keywords: quantitative; experimental design; child welfare; outcomes; siblings; California; United States; US; placement stability; permanence; child maltreatment; random assignment

Sheets, J., Wittenstrom, K., Fong, R., James, J., Tecci, M., Baumann, D. J., et al. (2009). Evidence-based practice in family group decision-making for Anglo, African American and Hispanic families.

Children and Youth Services Review, 31(11), 1187-1191.

This study frames family group conferencing as theoretically compatible with evidence-based practice and approaches that emphasize cultural competence in its focus on having parents as informed participants in the provision of services. Using survey data collected from parents, relatives and children's caregivers along with case demographic and outcome data from the state's case management system, the study compares family group conferencing with standard practice using reported satisfaction, measures of child well-being and data on exit from care. Parents and other family members who attend a family group conference reported higher satisfaction than those who attended permanency plan team meetings where the authors report that family members are generally outnumbered by staff members and other professionals. Relatives in particular reported feeling more empowered with family group conferencing. Given the finding that children placed in relatives' homes were reported being more adjusted if their family had attended a family group conference, the authors speculate that both having a family conference and being placed in a relative's home contributed to their adjustment. Outcome findings of faster exits from care and increased exits to reunification were associated with all families who had a family group conference, but these findings were especially pronounced for Hispanic and African American children, whose exits from care have traditionally been slower than for White children.

Keywords: family group decision making; family group conferences; evidence-based practice; child welfare; quantitative and qualitative data; quasiexperimental design

Titcomb, A., & LeCroy, C. (2003). Evaluation of Arizona's family group decision making program.

Protecting Children, 18(1 & 2), 58-64.

This article provides a brief overview of the interim results from a three-year process-and-outcomes evaluation for the family group decision making program in Arizona. The evaluation found an increased percentage of family placements and a decreased percentage in foster placements subsequent to family group decision making meetings. The evaluation also found high rates of completion of plans, satisfaction among families who participated, families feeling that they played the main role in decision making and families feeling listened to and confident

in their children's safety. Preliminary results suggested that 87 percent of children did not have a substantiated report of abuse or neglect following the meeting.

Keywords: Arizona, United States, U.S., process evaluation, outcome evaluation, child placement, child welfare, child safety

Glode, J., & Wien, F. (2007).

Evaluating the family group conferencing approach in a First Nations context.

In C. Chamberland, S. Léveillé, & N. Trocmé (Eds.), *Enfants à protéger, parents à aider, des univers à rapprocher* (pp. 264-276). Quebec City, Canada: Presses de l'Université de Québec.

This report highlights early findings from an evaluation of family group conferences with the Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services in Nova Scotia, Canada. Working with child welfare personnel, the researchers selected 166 families that were thought to be appropriate for a family group conference. From that pool, they randomly selected 50 to approach about participating in the study. Some families declined to participate and they were left with 28 families, who were then randomly assigned to a family group conference or non-family group conference intervention group that they termed the Nova Scotia mainstream provincial approach. Although the early findings focus on implementation and process issues, they indicate potential benefits of family group conferences. Participants positively responded to the family group conference model. Participants saw the benefits of this model as placing decision making in the control of the families, allowing time for everyone to speak and improving relationships between families and the child protection service. The authors suggested that the process elicit more in-depth and holistic information, which led to better familiarity with the issues in the case and the ability to make more appropriate decisions for the children and their families. Cultural leaders were particularly proud of the revitalization of Mi'kmaw cultural practices. Some of the early implementation issues that were uncovered included the initial lack of familiarity with the process, scheduling issues and acclimating the family group conference model to Mi'kmaw culture.

Keywords: Canada, Nova Scotia, indigenous, experimental design, child welfare, process evaluation, qualitative data

Wheeler, C. E., & Johnson, S. (2003).

Evaluating family group decision making: The Santa Clara example.

***Protecting Children*, 18(1 & 2), 65-69.**

This brief summary of a comprehensive evaluation of the Santa Clara County family group conference and family unity meetings provides evidence that children who had family group

conferences had better outcomes than children who did not. The study was based on a process, outcome and cost-benefit-analysis evaluation conducted in 1999. Children who had family group conferences had better stability of placement in kinship care and shorter periods in care. The conference participants also rated their experience highly, stating they believed it helped promote positive and effective solutions. The authors also found that family group conferences were cost-neutral.

Keywords: United States, U.S., California, process evaluation, outcome study, child welfare, child permanency, child placement, quasi-experimental design, cost evaluation

Lorentzen, B. L. (2009).

Effects of family group decision making in a voluntary family maintenance program.

Dissertation Abstracts International A. Humanities and Social Sciences, 69 (09), 3743. (UMI No. 3331701)

This study examines the effects of family group decision making on service use over time. The data were drawn from an experimental study conducted in Fresno County, Calif., of a voluntary program for families with substantiated child maltreatment. The sample included 58 families randomly assigned to an experimental group or a control group. The two groups were similar in terms of number of children, race/ethnicity and risk factors. No statistically significant differences were found between the experimental and control groups in terms of worker contacts, prescribed services started and reasons for case closure. The experimental group was twice as likely as the control group to have cases closed because of refusal of service; however, the difference was not statistically significant, and the confidence interval was quite wide, indicating a lack of precision in estimation. The author notes that results might have been contaminated because the same workers had families in both groups, and further speculates that families might have needed more than a one-time meeting because of changes in their situations. In conclusion, the author proposes that more rigorous research is needed before expanding family group decision making beyond its current sites.

Keywords: California; US; child welfare; delivery system; program evaluation; randomized control trial; quantitative data

Falck, S. (2008).

Do family group conferences lead to a better situation for the children involved?

Oslo, Norway: NOVA (Norwegian Social Research), Ministry of Education and Research.

This study from Norway reports on outcomes for children immediately after attending a family group conference and one year later. Conducted from 2003 to 2006, the study used a nonrandom comparison group, selected by child protection workers, of families who met the criteria for a

family group conference referral but were served by other child protection interventions. The level of problem seriousness was similar for the family group conference and comparison groups during the pre-test period. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, including interviews of parents; questionnaires distributed to child protection workers, conference coordinators, parents, children over eight years old, and teachers; and a review of outcomes based on family group conference action plans, or for the comparison group, child protection plans. Family members reported satisfaction with the process and a high level of father involvement was found. Overall, the study reports positive outcomes for those children who had participated in a family group conference, in terms of their level of problems and their improved care and support. The action plans for the two groups showed greater mobilization of family networks for the family group conference group than for the comparison group.

Keywords: Norway, child welfare, outcome evaluation, quasi-experimental design, quantitative data

**Holland, S., Scourfield, J., O'Neill, S., & Pithouse, A. (2005).
Democratising the family and the state? The case of family group conferences in child welfare.**

Journal of Social Policy, 34(1), 59-77.

This article represents findings from a small, qualitative study of family group conferencing in Wales. The research explored the potential for the family group conference to shift the power balance between the state and families involved in the family group conference and to democratize decision-making within families. Twenty-five children and young people were interviewed within one month of their conferences and were re-interviewed six months later. Participating adult family members, social workers and coordinators were also interviewed. The research indicates that while professionals are generally committed to the philosophy and process of family group conferencing, in practice, there are a number of ways in which professionals retain some control over the decision-making process. The study provides positive signs regarding the involvement of children, father figures and extended family members within the family group conference. That said, while most children felt listened to, only a small number felt they had influenced the outcome significantly. The authors report that, in general, families were positive about their conference experience. Interestingly, however, the authors reported some family resistance to aspects that have been seen as empowering components of the family group conference; in particular, the use of private family time, while universally supported by professionals, had a mixed response from families. Despite the mix of findings with respect to conferences as democratizing processes, the authors tentatively conclude that the family group conference nevertheless has potential to both model and promote democracy within family relationships.

Keywords: United Kingdom, U.K., Wales, child participation, child welfare, qualitative data

Connolly, M. (2004).

Convening family group conferences: Coordinators talk about professional issues.

Social Work Review, 16, 8-10.

This article represents a small qualitative study examining the professional issues experienced by care and protection coordinators who have been convening family group conferences since the early years of the New Zealand legislation. Coordinators talk about the issues that impact their practice within the contemporary environment. In particular, this research focuses on issues relating to the changing nature of the coordinating role within the child protection system and on professional issues such as supervision and training. While fiscal pressures, high staff turnover and increased experiences of violence affect the coordinator's role in a variety of ways, coordinators nevertheless talked with enthusiasm about working with family-led decision-making.

Keywords: qualitative, New Zealand, child welfare, role of coordinator, child safety

Connolly, M. (2005).

Consulting with care and protection resource panels: Coordinators' perspectives.

Te Awatea Review, 3(1), 9-11.

This article discusses the establishment of care and protection resource panels in New Zealand and the processes of consultation provided for in the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act (1989). It then reports the findings of a study that examined, from the perspective of the care and protection coordinator, the process of the coordinators' consultation with care and protection resource panels, and the consultation's perceived value and contribution to the coordinators' work. Findings suggest that there is variability in the constituency, the perceived value of panels and the ways in which consultation takes place. Overall, while some coordinators talked positively about panels as a professional support, none found the advice useful with respect to convening the family group conference. The article then discusses the implications of these findings with respect to consultation with coordinators and more broadly, with social workers.

Keywords: role of coordinator, qualitative, child welfare, New Zealand, child safety

Crampton, D. S., Crea, T. M., Abramson-Madden, A., & Usher, C. L. (2008).

Challenges of street-level child welfare reform and technology transfer: The case of team decisionmaking.

Families in Society, 89(4), 512-520.

Fidelity to team decision making requires the involvement of community representatives, family members and social workers in every decision that involves the removal of a child from his or her parents or change in placement, including decisions to reunify or adopt. To better understand the challenges to implementation, 74 focus groups and interviews were conducted with 180 administrators, caseworkers, community partners, supervisors and meeting facilitators at five sites where team decision making had been implemented. The authors draw on previous studies that point to worker discretion and the challenges of technology transfer to frame their understanding of challenges to implementation. Findings are categorized as challenges and strategies associated with leadership, communication and resources.

Keywords: Team Decision Making; implementation; child welfare

Morris, K. (2007, September).

Camden FGC service: An evaluation of service use and outcomes.

Retrieved December 9, 2008, from

<http://www.frg.org.uk/pdfs/Camden%20FGC%20Service.pdf>

This study considers the establishment of the local authority family group conferencing service, and traces the outcomes for those using the service. The study covers the period 2001 to 2006 and draws on all the family plans produced during this time, alongside the tracing of family members to capture their outcomes and a series of detailed case studies. The data demonstrates a significant reduction in the use of formal proceedings. Evidence indicates the use of family networks to care for children, to provide support and protection and to meet the needs of children to maintain connections. The study also suggests that family plans reveal family practices and that families use the opportunities of a family group conference to demonstrate their commitment of care.

Keywords: U.K., United Kingdom, Camden, child welfare, child well-being, delivery system, implementation stage, program evaluation, process evaluation, qualitative data

O'Shaughnessy, R., Collins, C., & Fatimilehin, I. (2009).

Building bridges in Liverpool: Exploring the use of family group conferences for black and minority ethnic children and their families.

British Journal of Social Work, 39(1), 1-16.

This article draws on research gathered during a 2001 British evaluation of the use of family group conferencing in meeting the psychological and mental health needs of black and minority ethnic children and their families. The authors argue that few studies, national or international, have focused specifically on this group's views and experiences, even though the family group conferencing model emerged as an ethnically and culturally sensitive intervention. Using

evidence from two cases in which family group conferencing was used with minority families, the researchers conclude that family group conferencing is an effective and beneficial tool in preventing family breakdown and meeting the needs of children and families, but that using family group conferencing is not a straightforward process. Its main strengths are that it is culturally respectful and promotes the voice of the family over the voice of the professional. However, for the model to reach its full potential, the article states, organizations need to ensure that sufficient preparations be made. These preparations include taking into account minority families' first operating language and consulting with participants, as groups, on the main issues they would like to see addressed. The article concludes that family group conferencing is a positive model for working with minority families but for further research is needed to fully understand the benefits of its application, including comparisons with other mechanisms and how different families from different communities would react to family group conferencing.

Keywords: UK; child welfare; black and minority ethnic; evaluation; mixed methods

Cameron, M. (2006).

Alternate dispute resolution: Aboriginal models and practices: Literature review.

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: Ministry of Children and Family Development.

This paper provides a brief overview of aboriginal alternative dispute models and how they differ from western alternative dispute models. The paper gives a synopsis of 12 examples of aboriginal alternative dispute models used in jurisdictions within Canada, the United States and Australia. The paper outlines some common planning and procedural elements, and underlying values between the examples given. The author goes on to discuss the tension between western and aboriginal thinking, where the former assumes universality and the latter acknowledges difference. The author argues that indigenous models of conflict resolution are moving into a more accepted phase, where they are no longer tokenistic and superficial. The author concludes by advocating for models of practice which the community has agreed to engage with, based on the models' ability to meet the community's cultural needs.

Keywords: anada; British Columbia; indigenous; aboriginal; child welfare; literature review

Nixon, P., Burford, G., & Quinn, A. (with Edelbaum, J.). (2005, May).

A survey of international practices, policy & research on family group conferencing and related practices.

Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://oldaha.pub30.convio.net/assets/docs/protecting-children/PC-FGDM-practices-survey.pdf>

This report summarizes responses from an online survey of international practices, policy and research efforts on the use of family group conferencing and related practices. Carried out in early 2004, it summarizes in thematic form the responses from 225 respondents in 16 countries.

Keywords: family participation, child welfare, children's mental health, education, youth justice, delivery system, qualitative data, quantitative data

Walker, L. (2005).

A cohort study of 'ohana conferencing in child abuse and neglect cases.

Protecting Children, 19(4), 36-46.

This study reports on the outcomes for 33 families who participated in 'ohana conferencing and 27 families who did not. In Hawaiian, 'ohana means family. 'Ohana conferencing refers to family group conferencing within native Hawaiian traditions. This study included child protection cases in which parents voluntarily agreed to foster care. Originally, a social worker selected families to participate in the process, but in August 2004, Department of Human Services policy began to allow families to request conferencing. The family works with service providers to construct a plan when there is a report of child abuse and neglect. After being accepted by the social worker, the plan is agreed on by the family and the state. This study reviewed department case files and conducted interviews to gain information on the experiences of families who participated in 'ohana conferencing and those who did not. Findings show families who participated in 'ohana conferencing report higher satisfaction with government process and child protective services, as well as fewer court appearances and out-of-home placements.

Keywords: United States, U.S., Hawaii, child welfare, child placement, implementation stage, program evaluation, quasi-experimental design, qualitative and quantitative data
