

Family Group Conferencing Evaluation: Program, policy and practice implications– FACSIAR Lunch and Learn October 2023

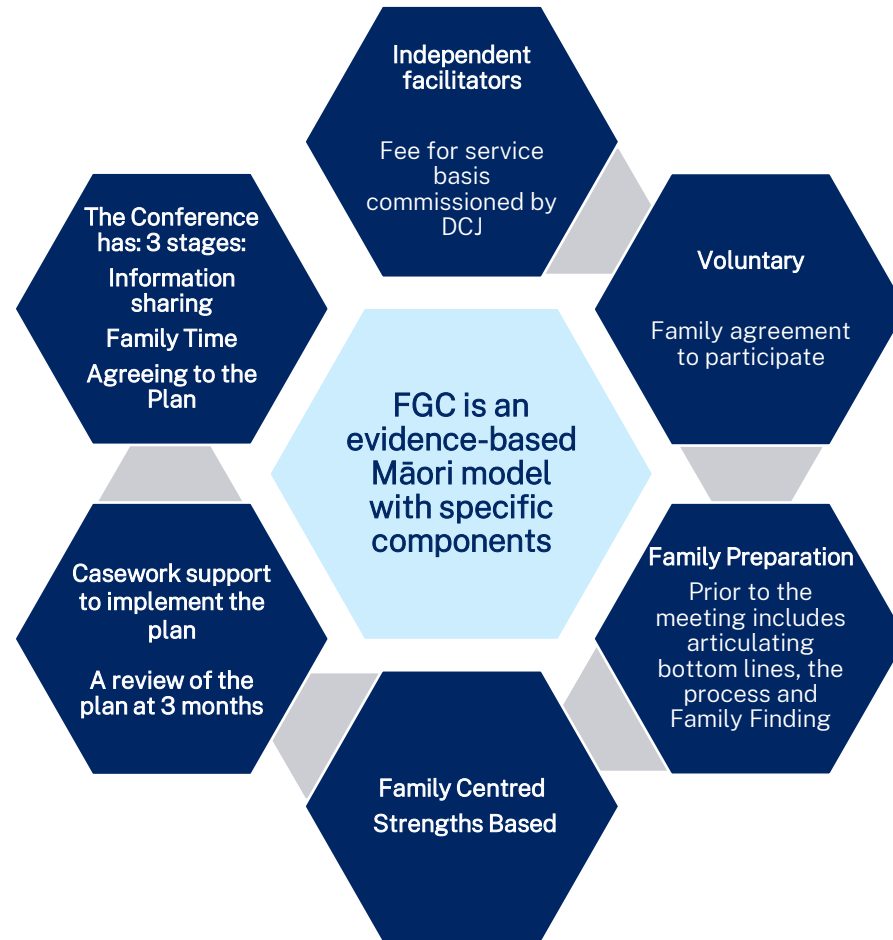
17 October 2023

What is Family Group Conferencing?

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is an approved model of Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) that has been used in DCJ for over 6 years.

FGC is a family-focused, strengths based ADR which seeks to strengthen partnerships between family members and encourage greater parental decision making and responsibility.

FGC is a way to bring family members together in a positive way with an impartial facilitator to make a plan for their child.



DCJ is required under legislation to offer a form of ADR before seeking care orders from the Children’s Court

FGC can be offered at different stages - after receiving a ROSH report, family preservation, restoration or any other significant decision point

Other forms of ADR used by DCJ, such as Pregnancy Family Conferencing and Dispute Resolution Conference may be appropriate for different family circumstances

Key Findings

Theme	Findings
Model Fidelity	The model, particularly putting families at the centre and the independence of facilitators , was highly valued
Effectiveness	FGCs were found to have a positive outcome for children, particularly in reducing future substantiations
Family Empowerment	Participants felt the FGC approach was empowered families to make decisions and keep children at the centre
Self-determination	Empowering Aboriginal families to make decisions for their families, particularly with an Aboriginal facilitator , supports self-determination , but more can be done to improve cultural appropriateness
Relationships	When conducted well, an FGC could help to improve the relationship and communication between DCJ and families
Achieving the Plan	Ultimately, the outcome is whether a plan achieves its aims, family ownership is important, but they need support to implement
Value for Money	FGCs were shown to have a significant social benefit , far exceeding the relatively low up-front cost

Evaluation recommendations

The FGC Evaluation showed that FGC achieves positive outcomes for children and families, but it also highlighted opportunities for improvement within 4 key areas:



1. FGC preparation and family engagement

Five recommendations
Two completed, three in progress



2. Aboriginal communities, families, children and young people

Five recommendations
One completed, four in progress



3. Communication between DCJ and families

Five recommendations
Five in progress



4. FGC processes and procedures

Ten recommendations
One completed and nine in progress

1. FGC preparation and family engagement



Five recommendations:
Two completed, three in progress

Recommendation	Completed	In progress
1. Caseworkers to understand the importance of their role in family finding and its need to be embedded in practice		✓
2. Training and management processes reenforce the role of the caseworker in identifying significant family and network members on FGC referrals to ensure the right people are present	✓	
3. FGC referrals from caseworkers need to provide facilitators with adequate information about the purpose of the FGC at the referral stage	✓	
4. Careful practice instructions and suggestions should be included in the roles and responsibilities about the appropriate inclusion of children in the FGC.		✓
5. Other means of involving children in the process when not appropriate for them to be included such as a photograph		✓

2. Aboriginal communities, families, children and young people

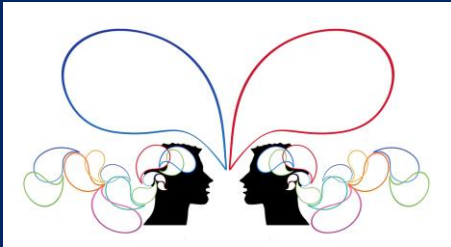


Five recommendations

One completed, four in progress

Recommendation	Completed	In progress
1. Careful and early engagement by caseworkers and facilitators with kin, relevant community members and any Aboriginal and other support agencies must be a part of the process in any Aboriginal FGC.		✓
2. Promoting cultural safety through support from Aboriginal facilitators and cultural support people is critical. The involvement of additional family support from culturally appropriate community organisations should be considered before, during and after a FGC.		✓
3. The opportunity to have an Aboriginal facilitator should be offered to all Aboriginal families. Where this is not possible, facilitators appointed must demonstrate cultural capability and implement cultural safety.	✓	
4. Embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (the Principle) explicitly into FGC roles and implementation responsibilities for caseworkers and facilitators.		✓
5. Connection to culture and cultural permanency should be a non-negotiable requirement for every Aboriginal (and CALD) child.		✓

3. Communication between DCJ and families



Five recommendations

Five in progress

Recommendation	Completed	In progress
1. Families and all of their network attending a FGC must be given comprehensive information about the conference, its purpose, their role and their opportunities to contribute to child safety and well-being.		✓
2. Families should be given clear and comprehensive information prior to a FGC, so they understand the ‘non-negotiable’ issues for child safety and well-being and the scope of their decision making.		✓
3. Caseworkers and managers casework should commit to attend the FGC as a pre-requisite to acceptance of a referral		✓
4. Caseworker and managers casework should be required to commit to follow up of family plan implementation as a pre-requisite for accepting a FGC referral.		✓
5. Following the FGC, the caseworker should regularly communicate with the family to offer support as they implement the Family Plan. Changes to the Family Plan should be communicated back to all parties involved.		✓

4. FGC processes and procedures



Ten recommendations One completed, nine in progress

Recommendation	Completed	In progress
1. The requirement to convene a FGC in four weeks should be retained but with guidance developed and circulated about extending that timeframe due to cultural or other considerations.		✓
2. DCJ local FGC administrators should monitor and identify reasons that delay the FCG process.		✓
3. The Referral Form should be revised to emphasise the purpose of the FGC, the point in the child protection process when the FGC is occurring and the scope of family decision making at the start of the document.	✓	
4. Facilitator performance must be subject to an effective monitoring and feedback quality assurance process, including a verbal feedback option for families		✓
5. The skill and expertise of facilitators should be routinely monitored		✓
6. A professional skills support and development strategy should be developed and provided to facilitators based on performance feedback		✓
7. FGC protocols should make clear that the NSW FGC model allows for facilitators to provide support to families during Family Time when requested.		✓
8. The review of Family Plans should be consistently conducted, documented and communicated, including the results of the review		✓
9. FGC data collection must be improved enabled better program monitoring		✓
10. SAP recording needs to be changed to explicitly link families to expenditure		✓

Focus areas for significant impact & key questions

1. FGCs have positive outcomes, value for money and should be used more often



Q: Why are FGCs not offered and/or held more often?



Possible reasons

- Tight timeline before court
- Caseworker unaware of FGC, its value or ease of delivery
- Refused in-field FGC offers unrecorded
- Family refusal due to community perceptions of FGC, DCJ or both
- Aboriginal family refusals for cultural and historical reasons including mistrust of DCJ and FGC

2. FGCs had positive impacts but the effect size for Aboriginal children needs improvement



Q: Why are there differences in results for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children?



Possible reasons

- How and when Aboriginal families are engaged in FGC
- Levels and relevance of support during or after FGC
- Pre-FGC work missing Aboriginal family composition or the need for time in preparation
- More Aboriginal facilitators needed
- Other approaches being used instead of FGC to reach family centred solutions

Project Plan – Scope, Approach & Consultation

In Scope

- Map ADR types and their relationship in casework to FGC
- Identify improvements and change practice to better deliver FGC to Aboriginal children and their families
- Change FGC resource material and training where possible and as identified in recommendations
- Seek ways to grow numbers of FGC – offers and convened
- Develop an improved service delivery and quality monitoring system of FGC

Out of Scope

Out of Scope:

- Changes to legislation
- Variations to contracts with facilitators and facilitator companies

Stakeholder
input for better
solutions

Districts

Practitioners

Cultural
Consultation

Facilitators

Administrators

