

Family Connections Oregon: Annotated Bibliography of Child Welfare Family Meeting Literature 2000-2014

October 2014

Expedited Meetings and Permanency/Safety

Department of Human Services, State of Hawaii (2012). Family Connections Hawaii Final Report.

The Early 'Ohana Intervention served families of newly placed children and children at risk of placement at the very beginning of their case opening. An "immediate family meeting" was held (within 24-72 hours) at the point of a family's first encounter with DHS in which removal and placement were being considered. Cases were randomized at the point that a Department of Human Services social Worker was dispatched to do an investigation to consider placement. Family Finding and family engagement started as quickly as possible after the launch of an investigation to consider placement.

Key Findings

- Early 'Ohana Intervention children were less likely to be removed.
- Early 'Ohana Intervention children who were removed stayed in care for a shorter period of time and were more likely to be placed with relatives.
- Within twelve months of an Early 'Ohana Intervention, more children were reunified, and fewer children remained in out-of-home non-relative foster care.
- The earlier an 'Ohana Conference took place (a voluntary meeting modeled after an FGC to take place within 30 days of the Early 'Ohana Intervention meeting), the sooner a child was reunified.
- Participants report a high level of satisfaction in the services received.

Burford, G., Pennell, J., & Edwards, M. (2011). Family team meetings as principled advocacy. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 5(2-3), 318-344.

To encourage participation of families, legislation for child welfare enacted in Washington, DC extended the time before a first hearing from 24 to 72 hours so that a family team meeting could be held to develop a plan for presenting in court.

Key Findings

- FTMs contributed to workforce challenges:
 - difficult for workers and supervisors to balance job expectations and involvements outside of the workplace, as meetings often occurred on weekends
 - turnover
 - family engagement jeopardized when the workers missed the meetings.
- FTM successes:
 - Helped reduce tension between the child welfare agency and the parents.
 - Parents arrived at court less "traumatized" or "shocked"; hearings were more productive because families were prepared.
 - Inviting the family to advocate for themselves set a precedent for collaboration between the family and the agency.

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 (District of Columbia) examines the impact of family team meetings (FTM) convened within a 72-hour period in advance of the hearing on where children were to live. Using AFCARS data, the study compared the permanency outcomes for children in three groups: pre-FTM, no-FTM, and FTM. Concluded that Family team meetings assist in re-conceptualizing client engagement from a worker–parent relationship to a partnership of family, community, and public agencies.

Key Findings

- Selection bias in terms of who received an FTM. Children in the FTM group were more likely to have had a removal due to physical abuse, a lower rate of disability, fewer behavior problems, a lower rate of abandonment, more housing issues, and a lower rate of parental substance use.
- The meetings significantly increased the likelihood that children would be placed in kin foster homes, have family-group-type permanency goals, exit care faster, and be discharged to family or relatives.

Family Group Conferences (FGCs) and Permanency/Safety

Frost, N., Abram, F., & Burgess, H. (2013). Family group conferences: Evidence, outcomes, and future research. *Child & Family Social Work, 19, 501-507.*

This literature review explores outcomes and challenges in implementing FGCs including complex data relating to outcomes, the role of longitudinal and randomized controlled trials, and policies and practices.

Key Findings

- There are mixed results for FGC – some positive and some neutral (i.e., no differences between intervention and comparison children).
- Process evidence is overwhelmingly positive suggesting a clear role for FGCs: participants feel listened to and valued, which demonstrates the value of FGCs even in the absence of powerful outcome evidence.

Wang, E.W., Lambert, M.C., Johnson, L.E., Boudreau, B., Breidenbach, R., & Baumann, D. (2012). Expediting permanent placement from foster care systems: The role of family group decision-making. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34(4), 845-850.*

This research focused on the impact of Family Group Decision-Making on expediting youths' exits from the foster care system through family reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or adoption using a sample of youths (N=80,690) in foster care in the state of Texas.

Key Findings

Family Group Conferences after removal increased the odds of achieving reunification with family or placement with relatives, but did not influence time to permanency.

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Walker, L. (2005). A cohort study of 'Ohana conferencing in child abuse and neglect cases. *Protecting Children, 19(4), 36-46.*

Study compared families that received 'Ohana conferencing or services as usual (non-equivalent comparison).

Key Findings

- FGC families had shorter case times and fewer court hearings.
- FGC children had few foster placements, emergency shelter placements, and fewer court-ordered permanent custody placements.
- Groups did not differ on placement with relatives.

Sundell, K., & Vinnerljung, B. (2004). Outcomes family group conferencing in Sweden: A 3 year follow-up. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 28, 267-287.*

Families referred for Family Group Conferencing were compared to families receiving standard child protective services (CPS) procedures using a non-equivalent comparison group design.

Key Findings

- FGC recipients were more likely to have had prior CPS investigation and caseworkers rated FGC group children as having more severe problems.
- At case closure, FGC group children received more services and were more likely to be living with extended family.
- At 3-year follow-up:
 - there were significantly more substantiated maltreatment reports for the comparison group and more reports of physical and sexual abuse. However, the FGC group was more likely to have had a substantiated report of neglect.
 - No differences on referrals for children's antisocial behavior problems.
 - FGC group families received services for a longer period.
 - FGC group children were more likely to be in out-of-home care at follow-up, but were also more likely to have been placed with extended family.

Gunderson, K., Cahn, K., & Wirth, J. (2003). The Washington State long-term outcome study. *Protecting Children, 18(1/2), 42-47.*

This study examined outcomes for families receiving Family Group Conferences (no comparison group).

Key Findings

- Six months post-FGC, fewer children were living with non-relatives and more children were living with their parents.
- 6.8% of the children were re-referred for alleged abuse and neglect (statewide average of 8.1%).
- Placements appeared to be stable (only 10.1% of children were placed in out-of-home care).

Family Group Decision Meetings (FGDMs) and Permanency/Safety

Sheets, J., Wittenstrom, K., Fong, R., James, J., Tecci, M., Baumann, D.J., & Rodriguez, C. (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 addresses family group decision making services provided by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services' Family Group Decision-Making study with Anglo, African American and Hispanic families. The FGDM was held within the first 45 days of a child coming into foster care with the goal of involving extended family members in the development of a plan of service for presentation to child protective service staff.

Key Findings

- Parents and relatives are more satisfied with family group decision-making conferences than standard practice, with relatives reporting feeling more empowered than parents.
- Children are reported to be less anxious if their families participate in a conference, and they may be more adjusted when they are placed with relatives following a conference.
- Exits from care are faster if families participate in family group decision-making conferences, and exits to reunification are increased; this may be especially true of African American and Hispanic children.

Berzin, S. C., Cohen, E., Thomas, K., & Dawson, W. C. (2008). Does family group decision making affect child welfare outcomes? Findings from a randomized control study. *Child Welfare, 87*, 35-54.

This article describes the randomized control trial of two family group decision-making programs (FGDM) administered under the California Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project.

Key Findings

No differences in terms of safety, placement stability, and permanence for children receiving the intervention compared to controls.

Crampton, D., & Jackson, W. L. (2006). Family Group Decision Making and disproportionality in foster care: A case study. *Child Welfare, 86*(3), 51-69.

This research describes one community's efforts to use FGDM to reduce disproportionality in foster care by diverting children from regular foster care services and keeping them within their extended families.

Key Findings

- Most of the children placed through FGDM remained outside the child welfare system; however, more than two-thirds of the cases closed with children remaining with legal guardians received significantly less financial assistance than caregivers licensed for foster care or receiving an adoption subsidy.
- Children placed through regular foster care services were more likely to be adopted.

Penell, J., & Burford, G. (2000). Family Group Decision Making: Protecting children and women. *Child Welfare, 79*(2), 131-158.

This study compared families in a *Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)* program with other families from child protective services (CPS) on 31 indicators of child abuse and neglect and adult abuse one year before and one year after the meeting.

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Key Findings

- FGDM families had higher numbers of problems in pretest period.
- FGDM families had half the number of maltreatment events in the posttest period relative to the pretest period, while comparison group events increased.
- The number of reports to and actions taken by CPS fell for the FGDM group.
- Cases of mother/wife abuse declined in FGDM group families and rose somewhat for comparisons.

Family Group Decision Meetings (FGDM) Practice

Healy, K., Darlington, Y., & Yellowlees, J. (2012). Family participation in child protection practice: An observational study of family group meetings. *Child & Family Social Work, 17(1), 1-12.*

This paper analyzes how family inclusion in child protection decision-making is facilitated, or limited, by the FGM process considering tensions in the realization of a participatory ethos in child protection services systems.

Key Findings

- Professionals dominate meetings (speak most, outnumber family members).
- Evidence of paternal involvement in the FGCs.
- Significant variance among the preparation, delivery and implementation of FGCs likely due to the complex relationships between parents and workers (i.e., parents are simultaneously the subjects of investigations, clients who need services, and partners in the decision-making process).
- A fundamental tension exists between the forensic orientation of child protection services systems and the democratic ethos of family group decision-making.

Weigensberg, E.C., Barth, R.P., & Guo, S. (2009). 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, 31, 383-390.*

This study utilizes 36 months of nationally-representative data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) to evaluate the impact of FGDM meetings on children and families' services. FGDM services if were collaborative meetings intended to draw on family and community strengths and allow families to design individualized plans to protect children who have come to the attention of the child welfare system.

Key Findings

Children who experienced FGDMs were likely to be connected with services (parenting services, children's counseling services, and mental health treatment for parents) than those who did not have FGDMs. After 36 months, receipt of services did not differ between the two groups.