One minute guide
Family Group Conference (FGC) Service
No. 3, November 2016

What is it?
Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are at the heart of our restorative approach to support families when there is a safeguarding issue. They aim to help families develop their own solutions to the difficulties they are facing.

An FGC is a meeting where a child’s wider family come together, talk about concerns and make a plan for the future care of the child. FGCs are intended as a respectful and empowering process in which parents, children, wider family members and family friends are given clear information about safeguarding concerns and are asked to produce a plan to address those concerns. Every family is unique. FGCs use a family’s own skills, strengths and personal knowledge to resolve difficulties. A major benefit of FGCs is that the child or young person participates and can influence the plan being made for them.

Each FGC is coordinated by an accredited FGC coordinator, who is independent from the social work service or other services. The coordinator is neutral, with no case management or decision making responsibilities. Most families and workers value this independence. A key element of FGCs is private family time. This allows the family to make plans without professionals being involved in their decision making.

Why do we have Family Group Conferences?
The idea behind this key restorative approach is that people are more productive, cooperative and make positive choices when people in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. The model was first developed in New Zealand and is currently being used in a number of different countries as well as many local authorities across the UK. Our FGC work is part of a wider investment in early help (guide) services, seeking to ensure that families receive the right level of support at the right time, which helps to prevent problems from escalating.

Our longer term ambition is to ensure that:
- Families, whose children might otherwise be removed from their homes, are supported to develop an alternative solution before such action is taken
- Families are supported to develop solutions in any circumstances where there is a safeguarding issue

Safely reducing the need for children to be looked after is a top priority for our city. Where it is safe to do so, we want a situation where FGCs are offered at key points at which decisions need to be made by families and agencies working with them about safeguarding and promoting children’s welfare.

FGCs are internationally recognised as an evidence-based method of working with families and are central to our commitment in Leeds to work with children, young people and their families to help them find solutions to their difficulties.
FGC in Leeds
Leeds now has a relatively large FGC service, which has expanded with support from the DFE’s Innovations Fund under our Family Valued innovation programme (guide). There are now four FGC teams in the city, three area teams and a fourth team which is looking at earlier intervention and more targeted delivery, including families affected by domestic violence.

In 2016, the FGC service receive around 110 referrals a month and hold around 30-40 initial FGCs and 20 review FGCs per month with families.

Current priorities for FGC work are children who are at risk of going into care, unborn babies where a pre-birth assessment is being undertaken, children where a child protection conference is being considered, family reunification after a period in care and families affected by domestic violence.

Referrals are mainly made through the child or young person’s social worker or the front door safeguarding hub.

Who are the key contacts?
You can contact the FGC teams directly:
ENE - 0113 247 8536
SE and Innovations teams - 0113 37 84159
WNW – 0113 378 2474.

You can also contact the strategic lead for FGC work in Leeds dave.basker@leeds.gov.uk for further information.

Want to know more?
There is a chapter in the Leeds Online Procedures Manual (currently under review):
Family Group Conference Service
And you can also visit the Family Rights Group website:
Family Rights Group – Family Group Conferences

The use of FGCs in the UK is encouraged by central government, and the promotion of FGCs as a key tool to involve families is mentioned in a number of policy documents including:
Children Act 1989 & 2010;
Public Law Outline 2008 (revised 2014);
Family Justice Review 2011; and
The Munro Review 2011.