

# Family Group Conferencing in Dutch Youth Care

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# What this presentation is about

- In a nutshell:



- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRRdhY5jOBE>


University  
of Applied  
Sciences



# About Saxion



# About myself

- Bachelor in Social Work, Master in Psychology
- Worked as a social worker for 17 years
- Lecturing at Saxion University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work
- PhD candidate at University of Twente
-  @benboks
- Blog: <http://daily-social-worker.blogspot.com/>

# Romy

- Watch Romy's story



<http://bit.ly/WjIJxy>

# Assignment (small groups)

- Imagine you are a school social worker. Romy has taken you into her confidence and told you about her problems.
- What would be the best solution, in your opinion?
- How could you help her?
- Who else would you involve?

# Whom do you consult?

- Discussion with one or two others:
  - Think of a problem you faced (not a technical problem)
  - Whom did you ask for help?
  - Who came to your aid?



# What is an FGC ?

- FGC from a child's perspective:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8Zc8QiJV7Y>



# What is a FGC ? (ctd.)

- NOT a social work method
- But a decision-making model
- Professionals only involved as information providers
  - Except in statutory youth care
- Based on two important health promotion principles:
  1. Community participation
  2. Empowerment

# The roots

- Nw-Zealand in the 1980's
  - Youth Care does not fit in with Maori population
  - Family networks not involved in care
- New Youth Care model based on strength of family networks: Family Group Conferencing
- The model is very successful
- In 1989: incorporated in legislation

# The roots (ctd.)

- Maori culture: all things are interconnected
- Things and people have more than one name
- Names and meanings change with the context
- Individual is not good or bad by himself
- Your context determines whether you turn out good or bad
- Whenever there is an important decision to make:  
Whanau Hui (clan conference/  
family consultation)



# The Whanau Hui

- All participants get a chance to speak and share their thoughts and feelings about the situation (respectfully!)
- Seeking a way to restore social balance
- At the end, one of the elders summarises the conference
- Closing the meeting with a hug or nose pressing

# Values behind FGC's in New Zealand

1. Respect for the integrity of the family unit, including the extended family
2. Strengthening family and community support
3. Sharing power between government and families
4. Creating opportunities for parents to feel responsible for their children and themselves
5. Sensitivity and respect for families' cultures

## **Additionally in FGC's on juvenile offenders:**

1. Providing opportunities for victims to have redress and a voice in how their offenders should be handled
2. Holding offenders accountable for their actions and for making amends

(Hudson, Morris, Maxwell, & Galaway, 1996)

# The introduction of FGC in the Netherlands

- In the 90's: group of progressive youth care workers is seeking a way to introduce FGC
- 2001: Centre for restorative practice established
- Number of FGC almost doubles every 2 year:
  - 2001: 50
  - 2008: 769
- 2010: Youth Care workers in Overijssel obliged to offer their clients opportunity to have a FGC
- 2011: Dutch Parliament enacts law: statutory right to have a FGC for families in danger of having a Child Protection intervention imposed.

# The current situation (2011)

- 1306 requests for a FGC
- On average 3,7 problems
  - 25% psychiatric disorder
  - 14% mental handicap
- Number of participants: 3-50 (M=11,8)
  - In 2011 > 10,000 participants in an FGC
- More than 50% of the FGC's is realised within 2 months;  
81% within 3 months after the first contact
- About 1/3 of the families has been in care for > 2 years
- Many families have had professional help for more than 5 years

# The current situation (2011; *ctd.*)

- In 93% appointments for follow-up
- After 4 months: only 11% of commitments in FGC-plan not fulfilled
- In 66% of the plans, professional support was involved
- Costs: on average € 4.000 for one FGC
- But the aim of FGC's is not the reduce costs but to let families take charge of their lives



# Assignment: involving children

- Make a group of 4 or 5 students
- Think of creative ways of involving children in a Family Group Conference in which they are the key figure:
  - Making them feel safe
  - Making them feel free to speak out
  - Helping them decide who should join the conference.

# The FGC process

## 0. Preparatory stage

- Answering questions from the parents / the child
- Inviting people from the network
- Making arrangements for the conference
- Addressing safety issues
- Organising support for the child

## 1. Information stage

- Professionals share their knowledge
- Professionals inform about possibilities for professional support
- Group exchanges opinions
- If child is in custody: information on legal conditions

# The FGC process (*ctd.*)

## 2. Private stage

- Professionals and coordinator leave the room
- Family draws up a plan that everyone can agree to
- This stage can take hours
  - Sometimes the family has dinner together

## 3. Agreement stage

- Presenting the plan to the coordinator
- If child is in custody: guardian is also presented to check if the plan meets the legal conditions
- Discussing how to monitor progress
- Setting a date for follow up
- Discussing how to act if things don't go according to plan

# The FGC process (ctd.)

Three months after the conference:

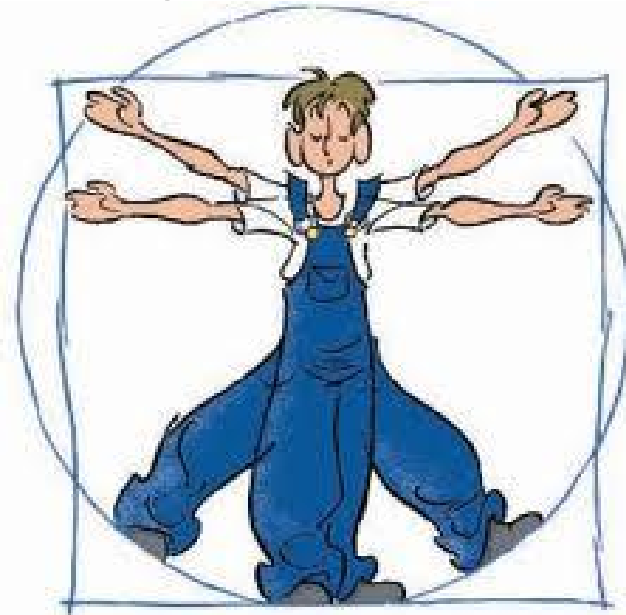
Coordinator calls all participants, asking: :

- How the plan is carried out
- How everyone looks back on the conference
- How they value the conference.



# Discussion (in pairs)

- What competences would it require from you to work successfully with an FGC?
  - As a coordinator
  - As a professional



# Judging suitability of an FGC

## Contraindications:

- High conflict between family members
- Unwillingness to engage
- Relations with professionals have broken down



## Factors to take into consideration:

- The extent to which someone, with appropriate support and accommodation, can participate in decision-making
- Allegations of abuse, domestic violence, intimidation

# Applications for an FGC

In the Netherlands mainly in Youth Care,

- especially for making decisions about where a child should live.

But in recent years also:

- In cases of adolescents frequently skipping school
- In cases of domestic violence
- When taking care of a relative becomes too much of a burden
- In cases of an impending home eviction

# Applications for an FGC

- Internationally, FGC's are most used in situations characterised by:
  - Neglect
  - Violence
  - Lack of pedagogical capacities in parents
  - A need for complex and demanding forms of informal care
- And all FGC's are about:
  - Regaining control over your life



# Family Group Conferences: Goals

1. Allowing people to take/keep charge over their own lives by enhancing problem-solving and developmental potentials
2. Enabling them to (re-)connect and cooperate with their social network and use their resources
3. Enabling them to develop a plan with solutions to the problems they are facing

# Assignment

- Think of someone among your acquaintances/ family/friends, who experiences a problem
- Now place yourself in his/her position
- Whom would you invite for an FGC, if you were him/her?
- If you can't come up with enough names, use your imagination:
  - Whom might he know from his past or from contexts you don't know?
- What could each person's contribution be?
- Write down a plan, including provisions for:
  - follow-up
  - monitoring

## Large amount of international research shows:

- Vast majority of persons involved are happy with the results
  - Professionals as well as family
- 90% of families manages to draw up a good plan
- Plans are often more creative and comprehensive than referrers expected
- Measures that families take are often less drastic compared to initiatives professionals would have taken
  - E.g. child is taking care of by someone from the network instead of being admitted to a home.

# Effectiveness (ctd.)

Dutch research (2008) shows:

- FGC's focus on the same topics as professionals do
- FGC plans for children are just as safe as professionals' plans



## Saxion: Routine outcome monitoring:

Type of participant	Number	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Adult	1586	7,76	1	10	1,208
Minor	132	7,81	3	10	1,690
Professional	271	7,44	3	10	1,127
	1989	7,72	1	10	1,240

Satisfaction with the FGC in General (on a scale from 0-10)

Type of participant	Number	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Adult central figure	168	7,26	1	10	1,469
Child participant	31	7,00	1	9	1,390
Key figure	249	7,13	1	10	1,330
Professional	139	7,02	1		1,553
	587	7,14	1	10	1,428

Satisfaction at follow-up

## Fachhochschule Potsdam (2007-2010):

138 families nominated for FGC

- 57% are multi-problem families
- 34% : child's well-being in danger according to Youth Care

113 FGC's effectuated

109 Plans acceptable to Youth Care

61% without professional involvement

# But.....

- All these studies are no RCT's
- There is no control group
- (Dutch) Youth Care has a history of implementing new interventions without investigating their effectiveness thoroughly



Picture: <http://weblogs.vpro.nl/argos/2009/06/05/6-juni-2009-het-einde-van-glen-mills/>

# Participants on FGC's

*Things didn't go well at home. I wasn't feeling too good and I was arguing with my mother. The FGC organised things, so that people could help us. The conference was wonderful, because lots of people offered their support.*

*....without FGC my child would probably have been placed in care.*



*....my mother and I see each other more often and we quarrel less.*

*.... My son goes back to school. For a while he was bullied, but now this has changed"*

*I am happy. It gave me responsibility (child, after FGC)*



# Pitfalls (family level)

- Intimidation, imbalances in power
- Not everyone wants others to know about their problems
- Giving support can turn out to be quite a burden
  - *The FGC turned my whole life upside down. We decided that she could live with us and since that day we had to deal with all the shit.*
- Afterwards, people sometimes find out that they are too busy and too time-pressed to give the support they promise.

# Pitfalls (macro-level)

- **Fiet van Beek (General manager Eigen Kracht Nederland)**  
I hear some politicians talking only about saving money. They want the result, but not the process. The thing is: people won't take charge of their lives, just because the alderman says so. It only works if they really get in control and if professionals refrain from sneakily interfering.
- **Eric Gerritsen (Chairman of the Board at Youth Care Amsterdam):**  
Some people find me an FGC fundamentalist. In my organisation, I made conferences compulsory. Each team has a target. For next year (2013) a total of 800 conferences is the target for the whole organisation....It all comes down to being less arrogant. Even as a social worker, you don't have a monopoly on wisdom

# Discussion

1. Suppose every family in Youth Care would be entitled to an FGC, what would be the consequences for you as a social worker?
2. Think of a new application for a FGC, beyond the given examples.

# Pieter Hilhorst on FGC's

Pieter Hilhorst used to be a well-known journalist,  
columnist and tv-host  
Currently, he is an alderman at the city of Amsterdam



Source: [www.hetparool.nl](http://www.hetparool.nl)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=JlvxSiVO5Fg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=JlvxSiVO5Fg)