



## Family Group Meetings - A new approach: A safer and more structured process for all.



The traditional International 'Family Group Conference' (FGC) movement (based on the New Zealand model developed in the mid 80's), appears to have been largely bypassed by the huge evidence based developments in Restorative Justice and Practices (RJ/P) over the last two decades.

Taking cognisance of several large scale Government funded research projects (particularly in the UK), plus practitioner and trainer consultation by the Restorative Justice Council (RJC)<sup>1</sup>, it is clear that many aspects of RJ/P standards and practices have constantly evolved and been regularly reviewed and updated over this period.

At an International level, RJ/P is subject to several European

Articles and the UN Basic Principles of Restorative Justice Declaration.

In contrast the traditional FGC model appears to have stood still in time. Furthermore, much of the research around the effectiveness of FGC appears to be largely anecdotal and not based upon sound empirical evidence.

The report 'Examining the Use and Impact of Family Group Conferencing' (published by Scottish Executive - March 2007)<sup>2</sup>, identified several areas of concern around the traditional FGC model which, following a wide literature review, do not appear to have been adequately addressed over the last decade.



<sup>1</sup> Restorative Justice Council (RJC) - The RJC is responsible (with Ministry of Justice [MoJ] support and funding) for the creation of formal standards and the development of accreditation awards for practitioners, trainer's/training organisations and service providers. [www.restorativejustice.org.uk](http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> 'Examining the Use and Impact of Family Group Conferencing' (Lee Barnsdale and Moira Walker, Social Work Research Centre, University of Stirling - Published by Scottish Executive - March 2007) (published by Scottish Executive - March 2007) <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/172475/0048191.pdf>

An examination of the issues identified in the Scottish report, reveals several recurring themes, which are often expressed by those practicing or considering adopting FGC.

In particular:

- Concerns around dysfunctional family dynamics (especially during traditional FGC private family time), making it difficult for weaker family members to be heard.
- The tendency for professionals to exclude stronger family members from the meeting because of their potential for aggression or dominance.

The new SynRJ Structured Family Group Meeting, incorporating evidence based changes, aims to address these issues by providing a sound structure and adding the use of trained neutral facilitator skills to the process.

Our structured version of FGC - the Family Group Meeting, therefore includes the option for the facilitator/s to stay for as long as necessary/requested, to ensure the family have an effective, efficient, Fair,



Respectful, Engaging, Safe and Honest (F.R.E.S.H.) meeting.

In some cases, this could be for the whole of private family time or certainly until the facilitator is satisfied that the family are working effectively and safely.

As in Restorative Conferencing, facilitators remain neutral, do not express their own opinion or try to engineer outcomes. It is still entirely the family's own plan, which they then present to the referrer and other professionals, as in the traditional FGC.

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**SynRJ Directors**

*For further details and to bring training in this new structured Family Group Meetings process to your organisation, please see the our [leaflet](#), visit our website and contact us by phone or email:*

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