

Family Group Conferences in Aotearoa New Zealand: Developing culturally safer interventions.

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Children and families involved in decision making



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Jos' Photography



Traditional welfare system

Child or young person
comes to official
notice

- Alleged offending
- Abused or neglected
- At risk of abuse or neglect



Decisions made
by courts, advised
by Police and
Child Protection
Services

Hassall, 1996

Growing concern

- High proportion of indigenous children in care
- Systemic inequity
- Renewed interest in bicultural commitment



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Kawerau South School

Puao-te-ata-tu

- Maori perspective on the Department of Social Welfare
- 65 meetings, including marae
- Consistent messages
 - Frustration, anger and alienation
 - Deep rooted structural issues

Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1988



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Institutional racism

National structures are evolved which are rooted in the values, systems and viewpoints of one culture only. Participation by minorities is conditional on them subjugating their own values and systems to those of “the system” of the power culture.

Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1988



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Institutional racism

...it's a Pakeha bureaucratic system.

It drives the average Pakeha woman up the wall, so God knows what it would do for a Maori person who doesn't know very much about the Pakeha way of working.

Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1988



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Institutional racism

The decision and policy making power and control is concentrated in the hands of a few who are mainly white, middleclass and male.

Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1988



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Whakahokia mai te mana o te iwi ki te iwi, o te hapu ki te hapu, te whanau ke te whanau, o te tangata ki tona rau kotahi.

Return the authority of the tribes to the tribes, of the sub tribes to the sub tribes, of the families to the families, of the individuals to the individuals, representing, as they do, the generations of the past and present.

Tibble, 1984



The place of children

- Whanau
- Hapu
- Iwi



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Collective responsibility

*He tangi to te tamariki,
he whakama to te
pakeke*

*Children cry but the
embarrassment or shame
belongs to the elders*



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A new pattern

Child or young person
comes to official
notice



Family Group
Conference

- Alleged offending
- Abused or neglected
- At risk of abuse or neglect

Extended family
assisted to
develop
appropriate plan



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Family Group Conferences

...children and families have a fundamental right and responsibility to participate in decisions that affect them...

all people should be treated with respect, even though their behaviour may not always have been adequate...

address what are, in a most fundamental sense, both private family problems and public issues.

Hudson, Galloway et al, 1996



Family Group Conference Outcomes

Care and protection

- Ensure safety of the child or young person

Youth Justice

- Young offender held accountable and encouraged to take responsibility

Factors in success

- Role of co-ordinator
 - Careful preparation
 - Wide networks
 - Robust process
- Adequate resourcing
 - Allow implementation of plans
 - Across sectors



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Some results

- Reduction in numbers of children in State care
- Placement within wider family network rather than with strangers
- Restorative justice
 - Apology
 - Reparation
 - Work
- 80% completion
- Increased use of diversion

Ryburn, 1992

Maxwell et al, 2004



Resolution types for youth apprehensions (14-16 years), 2003

Resolution type	Apprehensions number (%)
Prosecution	5655 (16.6%)
Youth Justice FGC	2219 (6.5%)
Police Youth Aid	18, 534 (54.5%)
Warning/Caution	6521 (19.2 %)
Other	1065 (3.1%)
Total	33994 (100.0 %)

Spier & Segessenmann, 2004



Some concerns

- High use of restrictive sanctions
 - Not necessary for public safety
 - Inconsistent with the Act
- Ethnic disparities
 - Young Maori more likely to receive restrictive outcomes regardless of seriousness of offending in some regions

Maxwell et al, 2004



A workable model

There is a greater likelihood that these plans will be to the long-term benefit of children, since they are based on the paradox that whilst most abuse of children occurs within their immediate family, families also have the knowledge ... to protect children and young people when they are charged and empowered to do so.



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A workable model cont'd

The model is founded on the belief that family, in its widest sense, is more motivated than any other social institution to care for and to protect its own children.

Ryburn, 1992





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