

F&CS Conferencing Advisory Group

Terms of Reference

Background:

The principles of Family centred conferencing are rooted in the traditions of many aboriginal peoples from around the globe. A tenet of many of these traditions is the belief that a child belongs to the Family Group, which includes a wide circle within the community.

Family centred conferencing is part of the shift that F&CS is attempting to make in the way child welfare work is practiced in Guelph and Wellington County as part of the provincially directed, Transformation Agenda. The F&CS Conferencing Advisory Group is an essential component of ensuring community stakeholder input, acceptance, and accountability for the desired outcomes of our conferencing initiative. Family centred conferencing is a new approach to mainstream child welfare work, specifically when it comes to family involvement in planning and decision making. The intent of family centred conferencing is to recognize families as the experts in their own lives and that they hold the knowledge that will form a fundamental part of the solution to identified child welfare risks. It is also one way to attempt to address the power differential between the Children's Aid workers and those who receive Children's Aid services. The mechanism of family centred conferencing shifts this power in that it recognizes that the role of the child welfare worker is first and foremost is to assess risk and ensure immediate child safety. The broader role of child welfare in our society is to assist in the overall well-being of a child at risk and their family.

The intent of family centred conferencing is to shift the onus for finding solutions from the worker, to the family. The worker has the expertise to assess risk and ensure child safety under the mandate of the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) but the family has the expertise within their own family to find the solutions that mitigate that risk. Child welfare workers will look to immediate family, extended family, and the family's identified support network, to come together to plan for and/or make decisions that affect the safety and well being of children at risk. In return, the identified family support network takes ownership of the risk issues and the plan to resolve or mitigate the issues. If solutions are not found there, then the onus for finding solutions shifts increasingly back to Children's Aid under the CFSA. This will be a more systematic approach to the use of the "system voice" only if and when "family voice" is not able to have desired effects of mitigating the identified risk.

Definitions:

Family Centred Conference:

- A meeting where planning or decision making is needed about risk to a child or children.
- Participants include child welfare staff and immediate family, and may also include the child, foster parents, extended family, support people identified by family or other professionals.

Family Group:

- Parents/Guardians of a child at risk, the child (ren), the extended families, supportive friends, or neighbours, or anyone that the immediate family would consider as part of their circle of support (professionals are not included in the family group).

Objectives of Advisory Committee:

- To gain a comprehensive understanding of the principles of family centred conferencing
- To give input into how the family centred conferencing model will evolve at F&CS of Guelph and Wellington County
- To help disseminate information and socialize the intent of this shift in practice to participants' constituencies or representative groups
- To give direct feedback or to relay feedback of community, constituency or representative group who may have experienced the services of F&CS
- To help build capacity within families/communities to accept a larger role in the well-being of children at risk within their family group.

Activities:

- Review agency family centred conferencing activities
- Feedback/Input into family centred conferencing model
- Consult and advise on ongoing flow and changes to 'logic model'
- Consult and advise on evaluation

Membership:

- Community agency partners
- Key community members bringing relevant perspective/expertise
- Agency staff and management
- Recipients of past F&CS services
- Review membership of group on regular basis

Meetings:

- Two hour meetings twice a year
- Ad hoc sub-committees as needed

Current Members:

Sam Zuber, community member, foster parent

Kevin Boarder, community member

Donna Gerber, Anishnabeg Outreach

Rose Vito, CMHC

Heather Feilding, Women in Crisis

Jean Chen, Upper Grand District School Board

Suzanne Coorsh, F&CS supervisor

Lorna Schwartzentruber, Better Beginings, Better Futures

Donna Monk -Van Wyk (public health, North Wellington)

Erin Harvey, F&CS supervisor, conferencing, *committee chair*