



CELCIS Conference 2015



SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL CHILDREN'S CHARITY

Family Group Conferences:

What do they tell us about the importance of relationships?

Mary Mitchell, Lesley Cook and Shaun Thomas



History of Family Group Conferencing in Scotland

- Global model originating in NZ , 1980s
- Family Rights group piloted a number of models in the UK
- In Scotland , CHILDREN 1st championed Family Group Conferencing in the 90's
- Mixed model of delivery in different localities using same principles and process

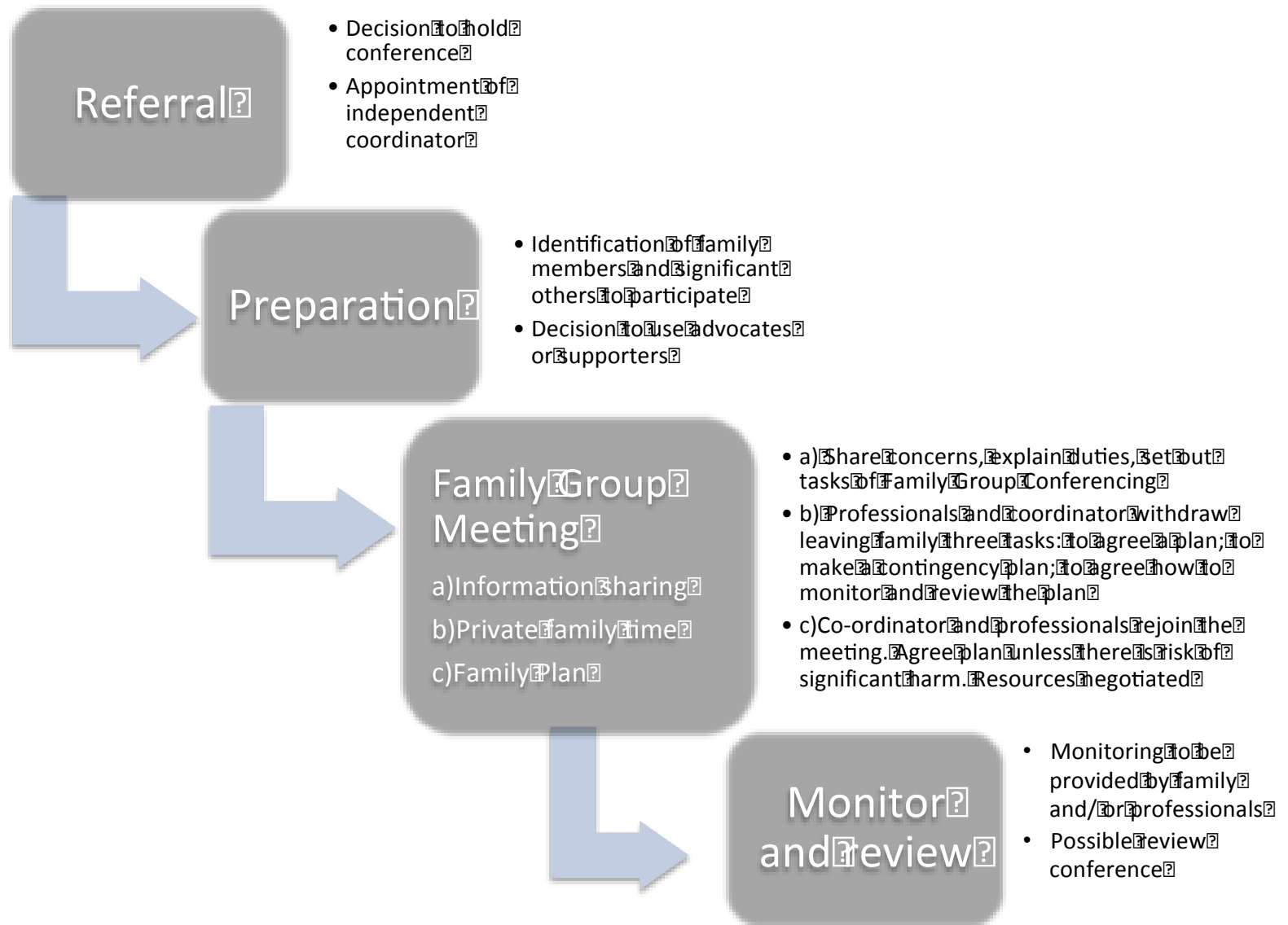


FGC and the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

- Part of ethos: early intervention & prevention
- Children's services planning
- Supports decision making for the child's plan where a child is:
 - at risk of becoming LAC and LAAC
 - possible rehabilitation
 - living in kinship care
 - LAAC and where permanence is being planned
 - maintaining relationships with family when child is LAAC



Family Group Conferencing Process – stages and key steps



Family Group Conferencing
emphasizes a family strengths,
attempts to be blame free and
solution focused.

Families are encouraged to
solve their own problems, in a
supported environment.



PhD (Social Policy) research

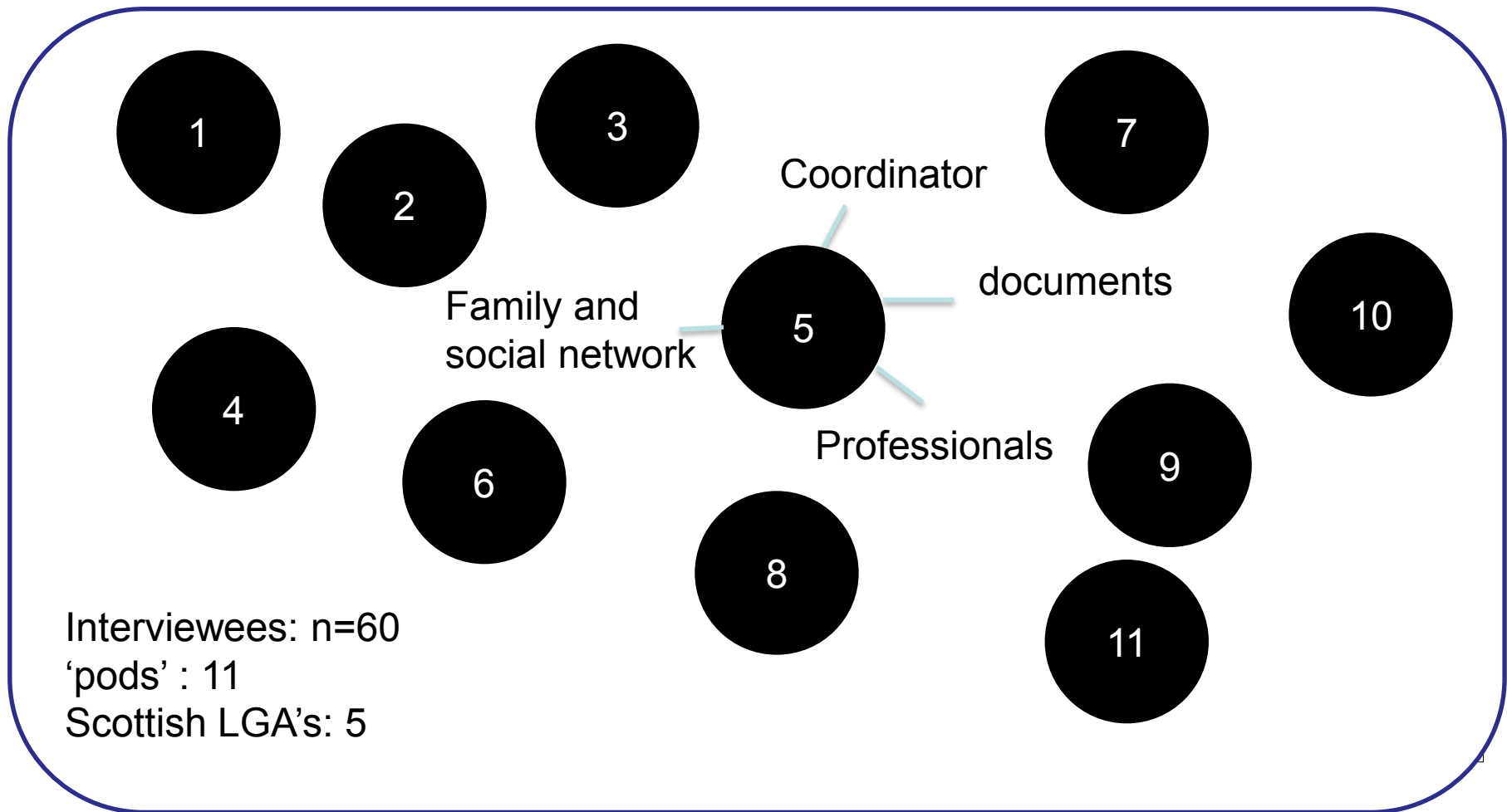
Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and is a partnership between:

- CHILDREN 1ST;
- The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships:
- The University of Edinburgh.

1+3 collaborative studentship



PhD Research: *What contribution does Family Group Conferencing make to longer term outcomes for children and their families?*



Complex Family situations

Families are often fragmented and members may have long standing historical conflict.

Children at risk of being accommodated so there is an assumption family under stress



Research suggests:

Family's who experience expressing their views and having their voices heard - in a way that is positive for them appear to:

- Make good decisions regarding the child's wellbeing
- Are motivated to 'do' the plan
- Improve interpersonal relationships

Supporting outcomes to be sustained in the longer term



An example of improved relationships

- Grace and Shane have 5 children (19-4 years)
- Long history with social services
- Justine (14) at time of referral
- Family conflict and risk taking behaviour, at risk of being accommodated
- 4 FGC meetings over a 18 months



Grace: oh definitely, I got a better relationship with them (children). We have some good laughs ...

Mary: what has influenced the change over the past year or so?

Shane : all right.... To learn to actually talk about the problems ... yeah that has helped . As I say it is still not 100% we still got a long ways to go Ehh ...just getting folk to open up. Its when ya starts bottlin' things up, that's when things go wrong basically



Grace: I think as a family we have come *such* a long way and stuck by each other, in as much as we have our falls outs

Shane :It was our plan, we did the work...It (the meeting) helps get everybody's opinions out and find out what everybody was thinkin'. What's going through their heads, ken what I mean?

Grace: I talk to my kids- I ask them if they have had a good day at school and if everything is ok and where I am if they need me and I tell them to go and talk to their daddy more and things like that.



Improved relationships

The process of the family members being involved in and responsible for decisions, at a point of crisis, may contribute towards improved relationships between individuals by assisting family members to:

- **understand different perspectives**
- **improve communication and**
- **focus on solutions**



- The experience can support and enable individuals to make positive and, at times, long lasting change.
- over time - **new skills and confidence may emerge** from these experiences, supporting individual's to continue to make positive decisions and take responsibility for actions that can ultimately move beyond the support of FGC meeting



Overarching themes emerging from research

- Hope
- Trust
- Listening and being heard
- Discovery of own agency, emerging skills through experience
- Inter-connectedness between family members and professionals
- Authentic partnership,
- Conceding power and recognising family strengths



Implications for practice

- Impact on the way practice with families and children is conceptualised and delivered. Challenge of the positioning of children and families status within child welfare practice.
- Shift in the perception of the social work role away from decision making for children and families towards knowledge, skill and resources to support families to make and to carry out their own decisions.
- Support social workers to recognise and question their positioning and role within child welfare. Raises the question of how comfortable social workers feel about allowing families to make decisions about risk.



CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Small groups



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