**Scottish Update for the**

**2019 European network meeting**

This is an exciting time in Scotland for Family Group Decision Making as many local authorities are developing FGDM services.

**Children 1st**

Children 1st delivers FGC Scotland-wide and is working in six local authority areas. Currently it uses FGDM within: kinship support, children at risk of accommodation, children returning home from care, vulnerable babies, schools, and within duty/intake/initial request for assistance social work teams.It is working with local authorities to develop creative ways of working to use the principles of FGDM to keep children safe and at home with their families. It has adopted emergency network meetings, initially developed in Edinburgh, with an aim to keep children in their families when there is a crisis.Children 1st delivers the Scottish FGC National University accredited training with three training courses delivered since last October 2018 and 56 newly trained Coordinators in Scotland in the last year. Ithas created six new FGC Coordinator posts this year and has established one new FGC service in the West of Scotland (Ayrshire) this year. Ithas almost doubled the numbers of Family Group Meetings delivered between last year 2017/2018 and this year 2018/2019, has created an FGC Implementation Team to ensure consistency and quality of FGC delivery within Children 1st and has enhanced its evaluation and impact reporting to ensure quality of service and social impact.

**Family Rights Group**

Family Rights Group (FRG) was founded in 1974. The charity works with parents whose children are in need, at risk or are in the care system and with members of the wider family who are raising children unable to remain at home. We advise parents, grandparents and other relatives and friends about their rights and options when social workers or courts make decisions about their children’s welfare. We campaign for families to have a voice, be treated fairly and get early help to prevent problems escalating. We champion family group conferences and other policies and practices that keep children safe within their family network where possible, and strengthen the positive family and community support networks of young people who cannot live with their parents.

In Scotland the FRG works in partnership with local authorities and voluntary organizations to deliver and promote Lifelong Links. The aim of Lifelong Links is to build positive lasting support networks for children in the care system. The Lifelong Links model is built around Family Group Conferencing with some additional tools which support the coordinator to discover the young person’s wider network. We have five trial sites in Scotland, the City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow City Council, West Lothian Council where the Lifelong Links service is run by Children 1st, Falkirk Council where the Lifelong links service is run by Barnardo’s and Perth and Kinross Council. The Lifelong Links trial is being evaluated by Strathclyde University this is a longitudinal study over 5 years with the initial findings being published in March 2020. To date 162 children and young people have benefited from Lifelong Links or are currently in the middle of the process in Scotland.

In 2019 Falkirk and Perth and Kinross councils joined the Lifelong trial neither local authority had a FGC service before joining the trial, both have now developed a FGC service. Falkirk Council has five coordinators employed by Barnardo’s a voluntary organization who deliver the FGC and Lifelong Links service. Their FGC work is predominately for children and young people who are at risk of coming into care. Falkirk Council has developed a ‘Closer to home’ strategy which pledges that no young person will be placed in care further than 25 miles of the local authority. The service in Falkirk has been running since April 2019 and already is seeing success with many children being supported to continue to live with their families. Perth and Kinross Council have two coordinators delivering FGC and Lifelong Links and the service is a part of a new strategy called REACH the primary aim of this strategy is to help the most vulnerable young people to remain within their families, schools and communities. The service has been running since April 2018 and they have held a number of very successful family meetings. The local authority have already recognized the great benefits that FGC can bring to children, young people and their families and are now looking to expand the FGC service.

**Edinburgh City Council**

Edinburgh Family Group Decision Making team are now a team of 22 co-ordinators (18 full time equivalents) part of Edinburgh City Council social work department.

Edinburgh has an automatic referral to FGDM for all unborn babies and babies up to the age of 12 months that are going to be subject of child protection pre-birth case conferences or Social Work Assessment. The aim is to offer a Family Meeting prior to the initial case conference or between the initial and the review meeting.

There is also an automatic notification to FGDM where the family of any child that has been placed on the Child Protection register is offered a Family Meeting following initial registration, with the aim of creating a safe and robust plan for the Review Case Conference, to prevent those children from staying in a system where it is not necessary.

All social workers who are asking for a care placement for a child must refer to the FGDM so that an offer can be made to the family.

From April 2018 to March 2019 the FGDM received 496 referrals for a family meeting for children and this led to 238 meetings and many more significant pieces of work. We also received 74 referrals for our adult service which led to 20 family meetings. Total number of FGDMs held over this year was 258 from 570 referrals.

Outcomes of the meetings for children: 19 children rehabilitated home or to family from care placements, 24 child protection safety plans made at an FGDM, 26 kinship placements found for children that might have gone into foster or residential care, 93 children supported to stay at home with the support of wider family and friends.

99% of our referrals are made by social workers with a small number made by schools and family self-referrals.

**Barnardo’s**

Barnardo’s Pathways Family Group Decision Making Service has been commissioned by Falkirk Council to provide Independent Family Group Decision Making for families with young people on the edge of care, on the child protection register or in crisis. Barnardo’s staff completed their training at the start of 2019 and the service started delivering Family Meetings in April 2019.

Barnardo’s Pathways and Falkirk Council were chosen as an extended trial site for Lifelong Links. Following staff training with the Family Rights Group the service is now in a position to accept Lifelong Links referrals for young people in the Falkirk care system. The new service has welcomed the support from the established FGDM and Lifelong Services in providing support, knowledge and resources to develop extend the models into the Falkirk Area.

Falkirk Council has been developing the Safe and Together model to support families who have experienced domestic violence. All the current Pathways FGDM coordinators have had this additional training and this is informing their coordination of Family Meetings using the safe and together lenses, such as when they are gathering family member’s views. Barnardos is aware of the impact working with families can have on staff and the team have explored a Wellbeing Action Plan to support staff to deliver the best service they can while receiving appropriate support for coordinators.

**Glasgow City Council**

**Glasgow City Council** is now a city wide service with three bases across Glasgow. We now have a total of 14 full time, qualified social workers who are also trained in both Family Group Decision Making and Life Long links. We offer our service to children and families social workers. We receive referrals ranging from vulnerable babies, children Looked after and Accommodated, children deemed “cusp of care” and children placed with kinship carers (extended family or individuals identified who are invested in a child’s welfare)

We have strong working relationships with The Children’s Hearing system, children’s reporters and panel members providing them with regular briefings about the service we are about to embark on facilitating ongoing training for this organisation.

We believe we have been instrumental in the “culture change” within our children and families service, supporting social workers to identify the positives about the families and communities they work with. We work closely with our Early Intervention service to prevent child protection procedures being invoked in an attempt to prevent statutory legal orders being applied for.

Across the city we have had over 1000 referrals since December 2016 when the service was implemented, this equates to approximately 240 family meetings. We have an administrator full time at the Mitchell library who creates family genogram’s accessing “Scotland’s People” data base. In the North East of the city we have found over 4000 additional family member. This is fantastic news for our children and is opening up other possibilities and alternatives to state care.

We are part of the Long Life Links trial with the Family Rights Group. This service has been well received in Glasgow, 3 dedicated lifelong links workers will be employed to roll out a lifelong links approach to our young people currently residing in residential children’s units. We will also be supporting the training of all 450 residential care staff in Glasgow to offer young people the opportunity to make lasting connections with family and important people from their lives.

**North Lanarkshire Council**

North Lanarkshire Child and Family Social work have always promoted the use of FGC. Over the past 18 months it has strengthened the model by allocating two dedicated FGC social workers to the FGC service. The FGC service was formally introduced to two of our six Children and Family Locality teams, as a pilot.  Over the first year, an Improvement Strategy was implemented and has demonstrated extensive progress during the early stages. The three key primary drivers are:

1. Improve the wellbeing of children
2. Prevent children and young people becoming looked after away from home, out with their family network
3. Improve the evaluation and systems for FGC.

Over the past year primary and secondary drivers have been achieved. Plans continue to keep a strong focus on engagement with children and families to progress and improve the child/ren wellbeing and work towards prevent accommodation. The voice of the child/ren have been heard and family members have been active in decision making. A further commitment was given to expand the service across all six locality teams, giving priority to children who are accommodated (including kinship care) or at risk of being accommodated.

In addition to the projects mentioned above, many other local authorities are beginning to develop family group decision making services, including Midlothian Council, Inverclyde Council, Shetland Council, Highland Council, Moray Council and Borders Council.