



# Daybreak Family Group Conferencing when children are on the edge of care Evaluation Summary

## Background

Daybreak is a charity specialising in the provision of family group conferences (FGCs). Their approach is underpinned by a commitment to the active participation of children to support the resolution of family problems. Daybreak, in collaboration with Southwark and Wiltshire children's services offered an FGC to all families to whom a letter of intent to initiate care proceeding was issued and provided 142 families<sup>1</sup> with FGCs between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

## Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of the independent evaluation was to assess the short-term outcomes of offering and delivering Daybreak's model of FGC. The objectives were to:

- examine children's and families' views on the strengths and limitations of Daybreak's model of FGC
- explore professional perspectives on the use of FGCs
- evaluate costs and outcomes of delivering the Daybreak FGC model to children and families on the edge of care in two local authorities.

## Evaluation

A mixed methods approach was employed including a survey to family members (72 in Wave 1, 34 in Wave 2) and 16 children aged 5 and over at the FGC; a survey 3 and 6 months post FGC; in-depth interviews with 15 family members, 4 children, 12 social workers, 2 FGC coordinators; analysis of anonymised management information system data on 213 cases. Historical statistical return data on children who started and ceased to be looked after in Southwark and Wiltshire, and the three closest statistical neighbour local authorities, were also examined to provide comparative data.

## Findings

Impact on care proceedings

- 3 - 12 months after FGCs had been convened three quarters of children were living with a parent (83, 60%) or a relative (22,16%). The proportion of family placements was lower in cases where no FGC was convened (61% in total; 22 (50%) with parents and 5 (11%) with relatives)
- during the study timeframe, proceedings were initiated in 29% of FGC cases compared to 50% of cases where no FGC was convened
- three months after the FGC, 97% of survey respondents considered that the plan made constituted the best outcome for the child

<sup>1</sup> The quantitative data analysis includes data on a further 21 non-innovation funded FGCs and separately distinguished, data on 50 families who did not attend a FGC

- in many cases children's services were still assessing whether proceedings would be needed to protect children from harm, so the outcomes above should be viewed as provisional

#### Implementation of the model

- overall, findings show that processes associated with good outcomes (including good preparation, follow up and a clear and consistent model of delivery) had been put in place by Daybreak
- local authorities were expected to offer a Daybreak FGC to all families who had been sent a letter of intent to initiate proceedings during the study period. Interview and focus group data suggested that in some cases, including cases where family networks were limited and/or levels of conflict were high, social workers questioned the value added by the FGC process

#### Satisfaction with the model

- all family members who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what was going to happen at the FGC
- over 95 per cent of family members reported that the coordinator had adequately prepared them for the process, agreed or strongly agreed that they understood why the conference was happening and had been involved in decisions regarding who should be invited
- the vast majority of children and families felt they had a voice, were listened to and empowered

#### Costs

- weekly cost of care per child amongst the FGC cohort were lower, reflecting the fact that more of this group were living with their birth families
- the cost for child A who remained living with their parents over the 6-month period was £1,598, compared to £17,557.66 for Child B who was looked after under s.20 Children Act 1989 (voluntary accommodation) for 4 months<sup>2</sup>

#### Recommendations

- review strategies to manage tensions when one family member presents a known risk to another and ensure that all those involved in the FGC understand these arrangements
- implement strategies to improve the rate of completion of Daybreak feedback forms
- explore with local authorities whether mechanisms could be put in place to integrate the FGC process more fully into existing child protection planning processes to facilitate on-going monitoring and review
- review the management of children's involvement in family time, specifically in situations of high conflict
- conduct longer term follow-up to determine whether plans remain safe and prove to be sustainable

This evaluation study was carried out between May 2015 and November 2016 by Thomas Coram Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London.

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*([www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk](http://www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk).) A full copy of this report can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)*

<sup>2</sup> These figures include the social care costs associated with entry to care, care planning, placement costs/maintaining a placement with a relative foster carer and review.