



Family Rights Group is leading a three year trial of Lifelong Links in seven local authorities in England and three in Scotland. Other local authorities will join the project as the trial progresses. Lifelong Links aims to build lasting support networks for children and young people in care. The trial is funded by the DfE Innovation Programme in England and KPMG Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, The Robertson Trust and RS MacDonald CT In Scotland. The trial eligibility criteria are young people in care aged under 16 years old, who have been in care for less than 3 years, and for whom there is no plan for them to live within their family or be adopted. We hope that the trial will benefit over 1000 children and young people.

The approach uses detailed search strategies to find family members and other people who are important to the young person. These people are then contacted and with agreement, brought together through a family group conference.

The trial started in April 2017 and many young people have already received Lifelong Links and we are hearing really positive stories from the participating local authorities.



*For me, Lifelong Links helped me to make contact with my Dad and I found out I have a large family who would like to support me and have a role in my life. I think Lifelong Links is a great thing for children in the care system.*

*Jamie, 16 years old.*

FRG has trained over 100 coordinators and managers in Lifelong Links. We have developed a detailed toolkit for practitioners and we also run regular Lifelong Links practice learning groups for the trial authorities to get together and learn from each other. There has been a positive sharing of support and ideas across the trial sites.

The trial is being independently evaluated by Rees Centre, University of Oxford and Celcis, University of Strathclyde and the evaluation is now underway.

We held two events on 10th May (in York) and 17th May (in London) for English local authorities who wanted to be involved in the second wave of the Lifelong Links trial. The events were an opportunity to hear more about Lifelong Links, our journey so far and plans going forward and how new trial sites can join this work. If your local authority wasn't able to make these events but are interested in finding out more then please contact us for further information.



## Family Group Decision making in Scotland

2018 is the Year Of The Young Person in Scotland to mark this and the 20th Anniversary of Family Group Decision Making in Scotland an international conference is being planned by the Scottish FGDM Steering Group on the 3rd October 2018. The conference will be opened by Maree Todd, Scottish Government Minister for Early Years and Childcare.

### Workshops will include:

**Family Rights Group**  
*Faithfulness to the Model: Fidelity, Accreditation*

**Lifelong Links**  
*Delivered by City of Edinburgh Council. City of Glasgow Council and Children 1st*

**Ask the Family**  
*Family Members who have experienced the FGC Model from Edinburgh's FGDM service*

**Lifelong Links with Care Experienced young people in Prison**  
*KALM solutions and City of Edinburgh Council*

**Restorative Practices**  
*Professor Kate Morris, University of Sheffield*

### Speakers will include:

*Lisa Merkel-Holgan from the University of Colorado who will share the USA perspective and discuss model fidelity.*

**Professors Kate Morris and Peter Marsh** from the University of Sheffield will be discussing FGC outcomes; what we are measuring and why, and where next as FGC has now branched into Health and Social care.

**Hedda Van Lieshout** from *Eigan Kracht Centrale* will talk about developments in the Netherlands.

To book a place on the conference or European Network contact  
[gillian.christian@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:gillian.christian@edinburgh.gov.uk)  
on 0131 221 2210

The international conference is followed by the European FGC Network on Thursday 4th October and Friday 5th October and also an authentic Scottish Ceilidh on the Thursday night so expect bagpipes and lots of Tartan.



## ERASMUS + project

The first transnational training mobility of the Erasmus + project was held in Leeds on the 7-9th March. It was jointly organised by Family Rights Group and Leeds City Council with support from Hertfordshire County Council, London Borough of Camden, Edinburgh City Council and Salford University.

It involved a wide range of family group conference services from the UK, France, Bulgaria and Germany.

The ERASMUS+ project's aims are to:

- to exchange FGC experience and good practices;
- to organise training activities on the different challenges and ways of implementing FGCs for each partner country;
- dissemination and development on a local and European scale;
- communication of results to the European FGC network project ([www.fgcnetwork.eu](http://www.fgcnetwork.eu))
- and to help raise the profile of FGC.

The Leeds mobility considered:

- understanding the philosophy and method of FGC and its participatory aspect;
- exploring the different possible applications of FGCs;
- the role and positioning of social workers in FGC: advice, participation, supporting the action plan

Activities during the three days included talks and discussion about the state of FGCs in England,

Scotland and Wales, about Lifelong Links and other practice developments in the UK. The final day was a one day conference hosted by Leeds City Council. It included a presentation by Saleem Tariq, Assistant Director on FGCs as part of system-wide change, and workshops on FGCs and domestic violence, and families' involvement in FGCs service developments.

The transnational dimension of the project is a decisive one, since perceptions and experiences vary depending on how FGCs fits into the culture and history of social work and the historic and current child welfare practice and legal framework in each European country. The dynamic and impact of transnational mobilities in European projects have already proved their effectiveness in terms of sharing, dissemination and communication on new practices.

Over the three days there were 100 attendees from FGC services and social care services from the UK, Bulgaria, Germany and France.



Family Rights Group have looked at all the Single Assessment Framework Ofsted reports published in 2017 to see how frequently Family Group Conferences (FGCs) were mentioned. We looked at recurring themes and what new developments were identified. Out of the 35 reports published in 2017, fourteen reports (40%) mentioned FGC services. This is a slight increase from our findings in 2015 when FGC services were mentioned in 38% of reports. It is worth noting that of the 14 reports that mentioned FGC services, 13 of these authorities (93%) were graded as good.

All comments made about FGC services were positive, the main themes being:

- the effective use of FGCs to identify potential kinship carers
- the value of FGCs taking place at the earliest opportunity
- supporting broad exploration of options and enabling well informed decision-making with minimisation of process delays for children and young people.
- the value of FGCs in enabling families to make positive support plans that build family resilience and facilitate children on the edge of care to remain safely with their parents.

New developments mentioned include:

- the effective use of FGCs in situations where there has been domestic abuse
- Lifelong Links

## **11th July, 12pm to 4pm, London**

*The child welfare legal framework: implications for FGC practice. Caroline Lynch, Principal Legal Adviser, Family Rights Group.*

This network meeting will provide an opportunity for FGC services to update their knowledge about the child welfare legal framework and its implications for FGC practice. There will be opportunity to consider changes in data protection regulations which came into force in May 2018 and impact on FGC practice.

## **19th September, 12pm to 4pm, Birmingham**

*Supporting family participation - Mediation and Advocacy in FGC practice*

This network meeting will explore the two areas of mediation and advocacy in FGC practice and how they can support the participation of vulnerable family members. FGC services are increasingly reporting that alongside their FGC practice they are offering mediation

either as an alternative response or as a support to their FGC work. This seminar will explore the experience of how this is delivered in practice.

Similarly services report a range of approaches that they are using to advocate on behalf of vulnerable family members in FGCs. This will be an opportunity to examine these different strategies and their usefulness in direct FGC practice.

## **5th December 2018, 12pm to 4pm, Cardiff**

*Signs of Safety and FGC practice – help or hindrance?*

This seminar will revisit the practice implications for FGC services of the continuing development of Signs of Safety as a practice framework being adopted by local authorities. How can SoS complement FGCs? What are the experiences of FGC services where SoS is well embedded?

## Here are some examples of comments made in Ofsted reports:

*"The Family Group Conference (FGC) service focuses on identifying solutions within the wider family at an early stage of intervention, with an increase in successful outcomes before family situations are beyond repair. 44 of 67 FGCs were completed successfully in the six months prior to this inspection, enabling children to remain in their families"*

**Stockport 2017**

*"Family group conferences (FGC) are used extensively and skilfully, complementing plans and drawing in support for children and their carers from their extended family, friendship and community networks. An increasingly restorative approach is evident in these meetings, repairing damaged or fractured relationships, thereby adding re-silience to struggling families. 'Dove' FGCs are being introduced to support children living in families where there has been domestic abuse. This has resulted in no domestic abuse incidents recurring following these restorative meetings."*

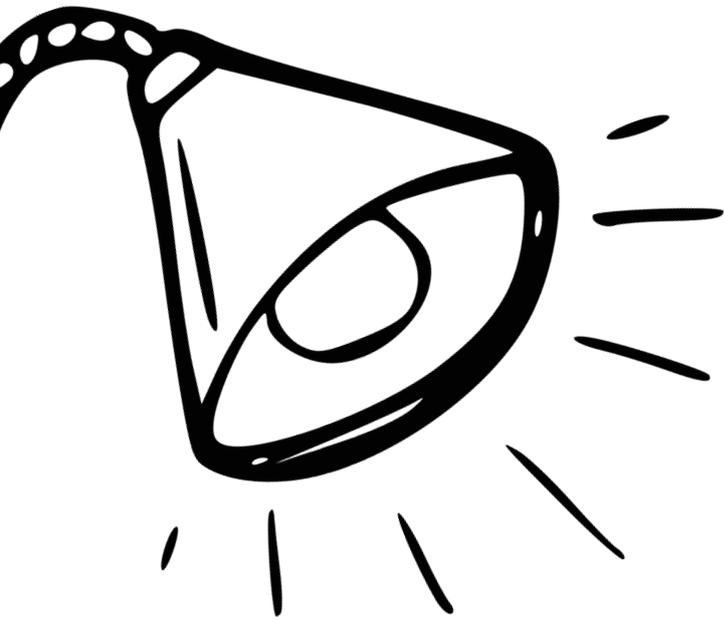
**Camden 2017**

*"The family group conferencing service is effective and well run. It is child and family-focused, with evening and weekend meetings and accessible venues. The service evaluates effectiveness and receives feedback from children and families which it acts upon. For example, some children and families do not want meetings to take place in social services buildings. Use of advocacy is promoted for both children and adults. Plans are child and family-friendly, and are sensitive and responsive to their different needs."*

*"For children on the edge of care, effective support and intervention are provided by a number of services. A family solutions team, multisystemic therapy team, youth services and family group conference team all help to support families to meet children's needs and enable them to remain at home."*

**Sandwell 2017**

*If your FGC service was mentioned in a recent Ofsted inspection then we would like to hear about it, what was said, how they engaged with your service and whether the mention has impacted in any way on the service. Comments to [Painsley@frg.org.uk](mailto:Painsley@frg.org.uk)*



## Spotlight on:

### **Kent Family Group Conference Service**

The Kent Family Group Conference Service (Kent FGC) is internally commissioned to provide Family Group Conferences (FGCs) for Specialist Children's services mainly for children at the edge of the care system. This includes children in court and specifically within the Family Drug and Alcohol Court. FGCs are also offered to children who are in care to plan for them to return to their family and friends network or when children and young people go missing to put a plan of safety in place. We convened 478 FGCs last year and the FGC target for 2018-19 is 500 FGCs; 450 'edge of care' and 50 rehabilitation home/'Missing' FGCs. Since April 2017, Kent FGC has also been taking part in a national trial-'Lifelong Links' funded by DfE to work with children who won't be going home from care to create supportive networks around them into adulthood.

In Kent, it is mandatory to refer all children at risk of coming into care to the Family Group Conference Service. As a result, it is this work-stream that makes up most of the FGCs convened (89%) but we do also, on an ad hoc basis, run FGCs for adult services and hold community-based FGCs. We are also looking to see how we might develop the FGC service further by offering emergency response type FGCs at the 'Front Door' through to work with care leavers transitioning into independence. However, wherever FGC is offered, it is a service-user-led planning tool, and is a voluntary process

which families can decline. It is anticipated that approximately 25% of families at edge of care will decline the service at any one time. Family Group Conferencing begins with the premise that the child or young person is central to the decision-making about them and that their voices are heard throughout the process by either speaking for themselves, using written or digital media, or being supported by an advocate.

Lifelong Links aims to identify and engage relatives and other supportive adults connected to a child in care, who are willing to make a lifelong commitment to that child. This could be a birthday card, visits or even just being at the end of the phone. We know that the continuity and permanence of these relationships can offer ongoing support, provide an explanation of historical events, and reinforce identity, belonging and a sense of self for the child. We are at the start of our Lifelong Links journey, but the outcomes so far have been very promising with on average a child's network increasing from 38 to 73 people supporting the child or young person by providing information about their history, enhancing identity, phone and social media contact as well as physically reconnecting with family members in a safe and planned way.

***Dawn Walsh***  
***County Manager, Kent County Council***



## News from around the Lifelong Links network

In May both Kent and Southwark held events to launch their Lifelong Links services, closely followed by Coventry at the start of June. All were well attended and were a massive success with some celebrity guest appearances from the literary world and lots of cake on offer!!!

### Lifelong Links Scottish Roadshow 16th August 2018 Edinburgh

For any Scottish local authority who would be interested in finding out more about Lifelong Links. To register interest or for more information contact Stuart Graham: [sgraham@frg.org.uk](mailto:sgraham@frg.org.uk)



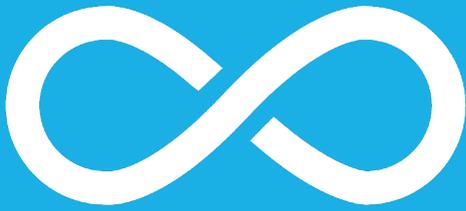
Kent's launch was led by their young people and featured a video they had produced featuring Lemn Sissay



Over 60 people attended Southwark's launch event from across the Children's service.



Matt Clayton and Shaminder Uppal from Coventry alongside Tania Rodrigues from Catch -22 at the Coventry event.



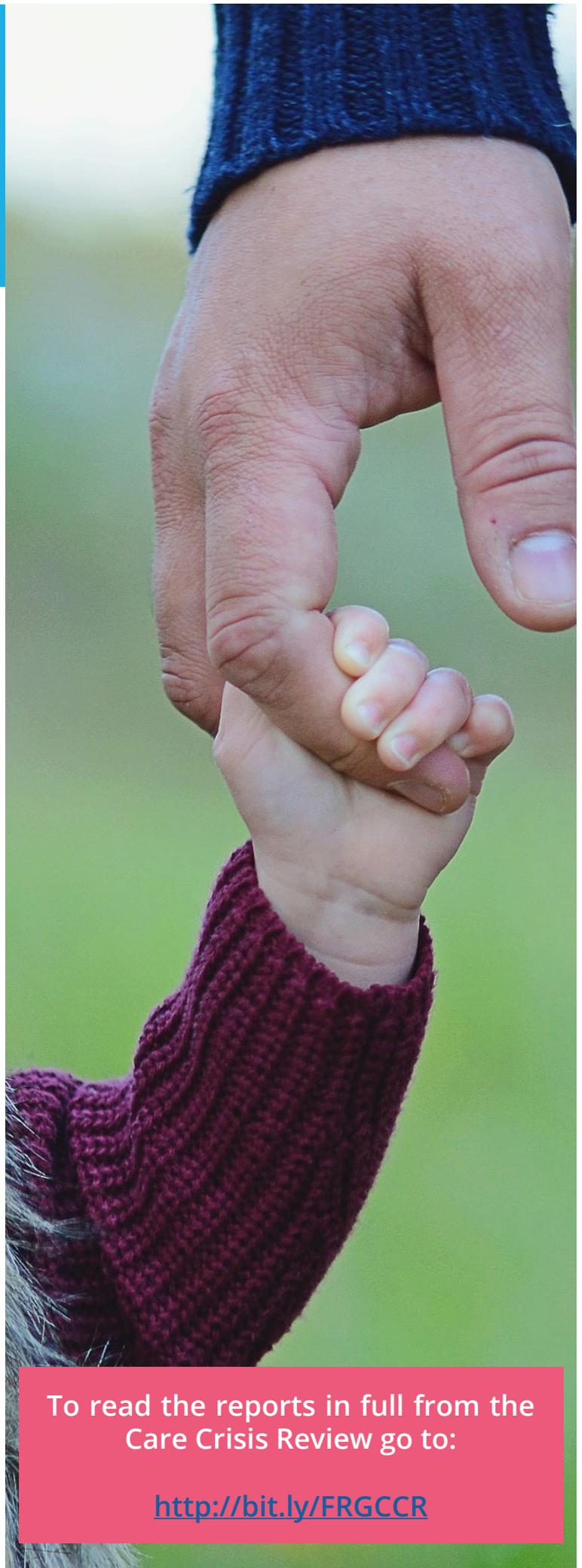
## CARE CRISIS REVIEW

In 2016 Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division, stated *"We are facing a crisis and, truth be told, we have no very clear strategy for meeting the crisis. What is to be done?"*. The Care Crisis Review was a direct response to this challenge. It brought together a 'coalition of the willing' from across the child welfare and family justice sector in England and Wales.

In England and Wales, the number of care order applications reached record level in 2017 and the number of looked after children was at its highest since the Children Act 1989. The number of children in care has been rising steadily since the early 1990s, except for a period in England in the mid-2000s. The Review confirmed the sense of crisis that is now felt by many young people, families and those working within the system. Many professionals described the frustration they feel at working in a sector that is overstretched and overwhelmed and in which, too often, children and families do not get the direct help they need early enough to prevent difficulties escalating. There was a palpable sense of unease about how lack of resources, poverty and deprivation are making it harder for families and the system to cope. Many contributors to the Review also expressed a strong sense of concern that a culture of blame, shame and fear has permeated the system, affecting those working in it as well as the children and families reliant upon it. It was suggested that this had led to an environment that is increasingly mistrusting and risk averse and prompts individuals to seek refuge in procedural responses.

The Review found that there are many overlapping factors contributing to the rise in care proceedings and number of children in

<sup>1</sup> 15th View from the President's Chamber [https://www.familylaw.co.uk/news\\_and\\_comment/15th-view-from-the-president-s-chambers-care-cases-the-looming-crisis#.WxewD0gvzIU](https://www.familylaw.co.uk/news_and_comment/15th-view-from-the-president-s-chambers-care-cases-the-looming-crisis#.WxewD0gvzIU)



To read the reports in full from the Care Crisis Review go to:

<http://bit.ly/FRGCCR>

care. This complex picture means that there is no single solution. The Review did, however, find plenty of common agreement about the way forward. There was consensus that relationship building has been and is at the heart of good practice. The challenge for all of us is how to create the conditions within children's social care and family justice that allow good relationships to flourish everywhere, within and between agencies, within families, and between families and practitioners. In tandem, the Review concluded that there is currently a significant untapped resource that exists for some children in and on the edge of care, namely, their wider family and community. Greater focus on exploring and supporting this resource could safely avert more children needing to come into care or could help them thrive in the care system. The Review proposes options for change that are primarily focused on addressing these challenges.

The Review sets out 20 options for change. These include immediate steps that could be taken to move away from an undue focus on processes and performance indicators, to one where practitioners are able to stay focused on securing the right outcomes for each child. Other options for change emphasise the importance of shared visions and ethos across agencies, with leaders giving a consistent message, including modelling the way they want others to act. They promote approaches, including family group conferences, in which families are supported to understand professionals' concerns and to draw upon their own strengths and networks to make safe plans for their child, safely averting the need for some to enter the care system. The options for change highlight the ways in which

statutory guidance, such as Working Together to Safeguard Children, can be changed in order to promote relationship-based practice. The Review sets out, too, opportunities for revitalising Family Justice Boards, and in Wales the Family Justice Network and other mechanisms, so that all can become places where challenges are discussed and solutions developed.

The Review supports the call from the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) for Government to make up the £2 billion shortfall in children's social care, and a similar plea for resources made to the Welsh Government from the Welsh LGA and the All Wales Heads of Children's Services. Money and resources for families and services matter. The Review also highlights the need for an additional ring-fenced fund available to all English local authorities, to act as a catalyst for them and their partner agencies to achieve the local changes needed to address the crisis.

The Review has achieved its aim of developing a greater understanding across the sector about the factors contributing to the crisis and of involving a wide range of those involved in the system in identifying and developing options for change. The next stage is much more important. For all of us to own the problem, reflect on messages from the Review, and consider the commitments we can make to safely tackle the crisis and improve the experiences of children, families and practitioners.

*This is an excerpt taken from "The Care Crisis Review: Options for Change" which can be found at: <http://bit.ly/FRGCCR>*

## Options for change:

### 6. Family Group Conferences (FGC)

That, to support a whole family approach, there is a long-term goal of ensuring that all families are offered an FGC before a child is moved into the care system (except as an emergency). As a first step, local authorities could introduce this as a local offer to families, with the FGC plan shaping how the local authority works with the child and family.