



# Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) evaluation report

Children 1st and Scottish Borders  
Council Pilot Project



February 2024



A big thank you to  
the families who  
shared their stories  
and experiences  
with us for this  
research

\* Thank You \*

# FGDM evaluation



## Introduction

We have recently helped with some research done by a University called Robert Gordon University to hear the experiences of families about Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) in the Scottish Borders. This was a 'pilot' - this means we are trying something new in partnership with Scottish Borders Council. We all wanted to learn as much as possible about what worked and what could be better for families and professionals. 24 people were interviewed - 13 family members and 11 professionals.

This is a summary of the final report - with a focus on what families shared with us. We will talk a bit about FGDM, and then share the findings from the evaluation.

## What's FGDM all about?



The idea of FGDM originally comes from New Zealand, involving work with Māori children and families in the 1980's. It's now known across the world as a way for families to be involved in child protection proceedings and family decision making.

At the heart of FGDM are human rights. This means that every FGDM provides families with the opportunity to plan, reduce, and manage risks and wellbeing concerns in their family. By making sure families are involved in these big conversations and decision-making processes it makes sure that families rights are being respected.

Scottish Borders Council brought FGDM to the area as part of their commitment to families being able to influence plans and decisions about their children.

Children 1st brought FGDM to Scotland in 1998 and is now the BIGGEST third sector (charity) organisation that provides FGDM in Scotland!



## What did families tell us?



### Voice and Wellbeing through FGDM

Families and professionals told us they felt FGDM was a way to amplify children's voices. They felt that the child's voice was always kept central throughout the process. Children and young people had a sense of belonging and inclusion by seeing their family come together to support them. It also supported the families to have planned time together between brothers and sisters which was seen by professionals (family's social workers) as positive.

Young people shared that they felt FGDM gave them the chance to say everything they wanted to say about their care. It made them feel their views were prioritised by the adults and reduced the conflict they felt at home.

'Yes I think so, they asked what I thought about things, and I got to say that I wanted to spend more time with my wee brother.' (Young Person Participant 2)

Families told us that their FGDM helped them feel they had a voice, which other professional meetings don't always manage. Family members also shared how FGDM helped them to support their family and children beyond the meeting itself, by encouraging them to use a more child-centred way and reach out to the wider family for help with the children when they needed to. Families felt the process had been clearly explained by the FGDM Coordinator.

'I don't think we would have a plan to bring [baby] back home if it wasn't for [FGDM coordinator]. I feel like there is a bit of hope now, but we still don't have a date to get him back. At least I feel like people are listening to me now.' (Family Participant 1)

## Safety and Risk



FGDM was experienced as a way to support child safety by reducing emotional harm and increased a child's wellbeing. This was done by the child knowing that their family were communicating and working together for them.

## Supporting to Potential through FGDM

Families shared that the experience of FGDM felt like a new experience as it was different to what they had previously experienced. Some families shared that they had initially felt unsure towards being involved in the FGDM process because of the number of other meetings they had to go to.

'...everything was just a bit mad to be honest and then all these meetings and stuff, I was just like aw, can't be bothered with this...' (Family Participant 1)

However, the feedback was that once they had been to their FGDM they felt it had been a positive experience.

Some families shared that extended family members did not always follow through with the agreed plan which at times highlighted family fractures instead of healing them. It was suggested by families that it would be helpful to have extra support in making sure their plan was understood and acted upon by all the family.

## Rights and Equality through FGDM

Families shared that FGDM supported the rights and equality of children and families in a number of ways. Families spoke about the positive working relationships that they developed with their FGDM Coordinator being central to the experience being so positive. They felt it was built on trust and felt the Coordinator was reliable.



## Other positive experiences family shared were:

- The language used during FGDM meetings felt inclusive for family participants.
- Young people had a good understanding of FGDM.
- Families were supported to have a voice and communicate more openly.
- The language used by the coordinator throughout the process was as helpful and well understood.
- The focus was on the strengths of the family within FGDM meetings which was felt to be an important way of reducing power imbalances.
- The FGDM empowered them to share their views.
- It helped give families a sense of belonging.
- Child-centred and family-led.

*'At the family meeting we could talk about what was good about our family.'*

*(Family Participant 1)*



## Working Together through FGDM



Families all shared their desire and hope for FGDM to continue in Scottish Borders Council. Families explained that the first meeting was key to understanding and seeing FGDM as a positive opportunity, where they were able to accept the support offered and trust the process.

'I'd just say, they're there to help and to ask questions if you're no sure and just, trust in what they're trying to do, trust in, in the process cause it's, it has positives to it and it can bring families together and it can build broken bridges, so it's just, aye just listen to what they've got to say, because it does help.' (Family Participant 2)

Families also suggested the need to consider the timing of referrals – which should take place when families first have difficulties and request support. It should be available through other routes such as the school system.

'I didn't even know it was a thing [FGDM service], I think that FGDM should be offered in school before it even reaches social work. It would have been good to have had this before it even got to his point, instead of after my son was taken away from me, people should know about this service, it might have stopped this from happening.' (Family Participant 1)



## Improving Benefits and outcomes through FGDM



Families shared that the key benefits and outcomes that followed the ending of their FGDM were:

- Reduced family conflict.
- Better communication (including group chats) - contributing to bringing the family together.
- Increased hopes for their children.
- Improved use of structure and boundaries with their child.
- Identifying roles and responsibilities in the family.
- Improved quality of life for the child and families.
- Securing better futures.
- The FGDM process helped them to be able to listen and engage in child protection processes more positively.
- Increased confidence of children.
- Helped to strengthen social support networks for families.
- Increased sense of being heard and included.

'We are all talking more, we are on the same page now instead of blaming each other. We all have agreed what he needs to do and when, and what the boundaries are. We can all pick up the phone and know what's expected of us all.

There is still a way to go though.'

(Family Participant 5)





## Things to improve



- More information about FGDM before the first meeting to feel prepared.
- Families suggested more awareness of FGDM through leaflets and professionals suggested a newsletter.
- Early intervention and regular reminders.

The feedback from everyone involved was clear: they value FGDM as an empowering and inclusive process and all wished for the service to continue. With the advice to others being to accept help and trust in the process and what it is trying to achieve for them and their children.

## Summary and conclusion

- The results of the study show that FGDM is a valuable process.
- All participants were clear that they not only wanted the service to continue in the Scottish Borders but wished for it to be expanded to include a wider variety of families with different levels of need.
- Families were happy with FGDM, especially in comparison to traditional child protection forums.
- Amplifying and keeping the voices of children and families central, helps to improve communication,

'I always felt, I still do feel that I can speak to [Coordinator] if anything was worrying me, I could always just give [Coordinator] a text message and she would get back to me to discuss anything... I know she would phone me and we would go through things.' (Family Participant 10)



[www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk)

Registered Scottish Charity No: SC016092