

*If you want to change outcomes for children,  
change the way decisions are made...*

Family Group Conferences in Aotearoa New Zealand and  
Australia changing patterns in Child Protection

Wednesday 26th April at 9.30am to 10.45am

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## Think about

Imagine you can no longer look after your own children, or you  
are a child and you can no longer live with your parents (this may  
have happened to you)...

- Who do you want your children to grow up with?
- As a child, who would you want to live with?
- Why?



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## Focus on..

1. How do we understand partnership in child protection?
2. What changes in thinking and behaviour are required?
3. How might restorative practices build a bridge?
4. What is the evidence and data telling us in NZ and AUS?
5. How might you make this work locally?



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## Some enduring products of orthodox child protection systems

- Blame, conflict and lack of trust
- Low participation and Learned Helplessness – children, families & practitioners
- Procedures and efficiency over people & quality
- Diagnostic inflation of risk – driven by fear
- CP System & Care get overloaded
- Children get lost in the system



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## What is partnership in Child Protection?

- What should partnership with families in child protection practice look like?
- What's the resistance to this?



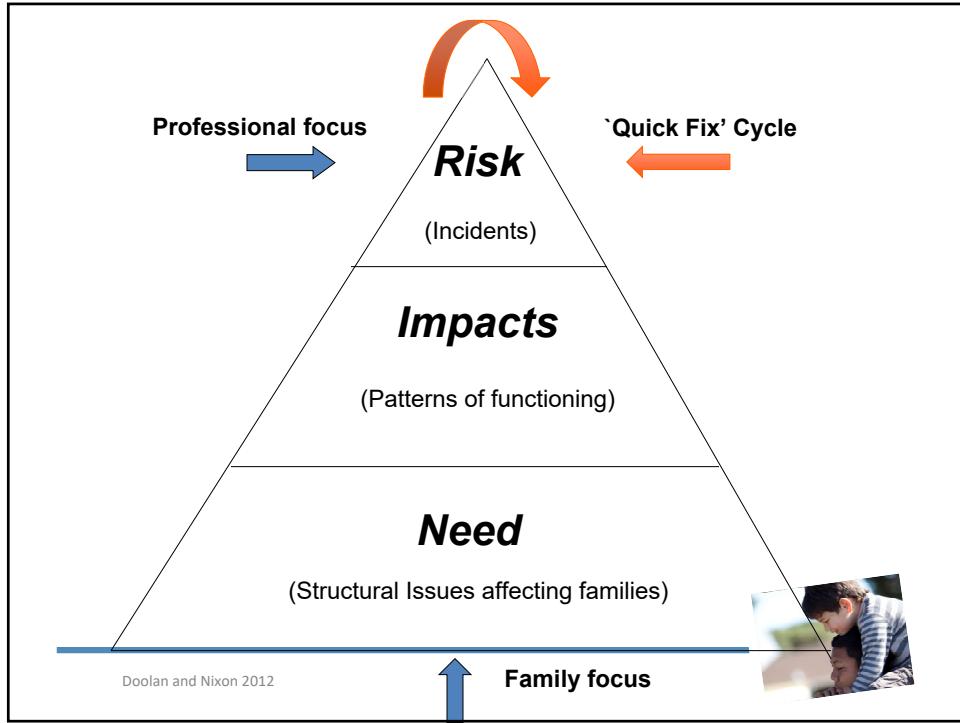
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## 85% of problems are complex and chronic...

1. Poverty, racism & poor health & housing
2. Substance abuse: alcohol and drugs
3. Domestic Violence
4. Untreated parental mental health problems
5. Social isolation



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## What if our beliefs about children were different?...

- Children & young people at the heart of strategy for social & economic growth
- Disproportionate investment in children
- Families and culture provide safety
- Long term outcomes over short term risks
- Holistic lens - child, family & culture
- Children & families as experts



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## Consider these narratives about Child Protection?

1. State has a duty not to over intervene in families, but to make sure children get the help they need
2. Children grow up best in their families of origin, their are unique advantages especially for indigenous children
3. Risk is a highly contested concept should not be judged unilaterally & needs consider both short and long term
4. State Care is a *risk in itself* to be balanced against others
5. Institutional Racism is showing up everywhere
6. Partnership practice in Child Protection is rare
7. Change the decision making process if you want to change the outcome.



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## What does the research evidence say....?

'Protection is best achieved by building on the strengths in the child's living environment, rather than expecting miracles from isolated and spasmodic interventions'

Department of Health (UK)



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## A bridge in Restorative practices

Restorative practice is a relational approach to safety, wellbeing and participation - achieved through building, maintaining and repairing relationships.

The philosophy embodies a set of values, behaviours and methods that give people a common language and way of working.



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Aim of Restorative approaches is to....

1. Develop community, build relationships and strengthen connections **Proactive (80%)**
2. Manage conflict and tension by repairing harm and rebuilding relationships **Reactive (20%)**

A focus on healing that is often missing



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## Restorative Principles

1. Give responsibility and power to those most affected
2. Move decision making to those closest to the problem
3. Widen the circle
4. Put the problem at the centre, not the person

Professor John Braithwaite ANU



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# Dadirri

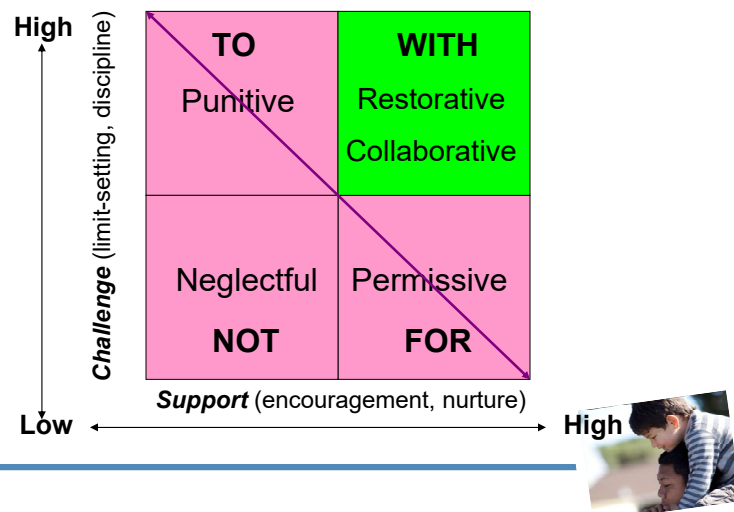


- Learning & healing through listening
- The essence of Dadirri in a wider context, is the creation of a space for deep, contemplative, heart-based listening
- Stories of trauma, pain, loss can be shared and witnessed with respect & acceptance.
- **Dadirri is in all of us.**



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## Dynamic relationships create change

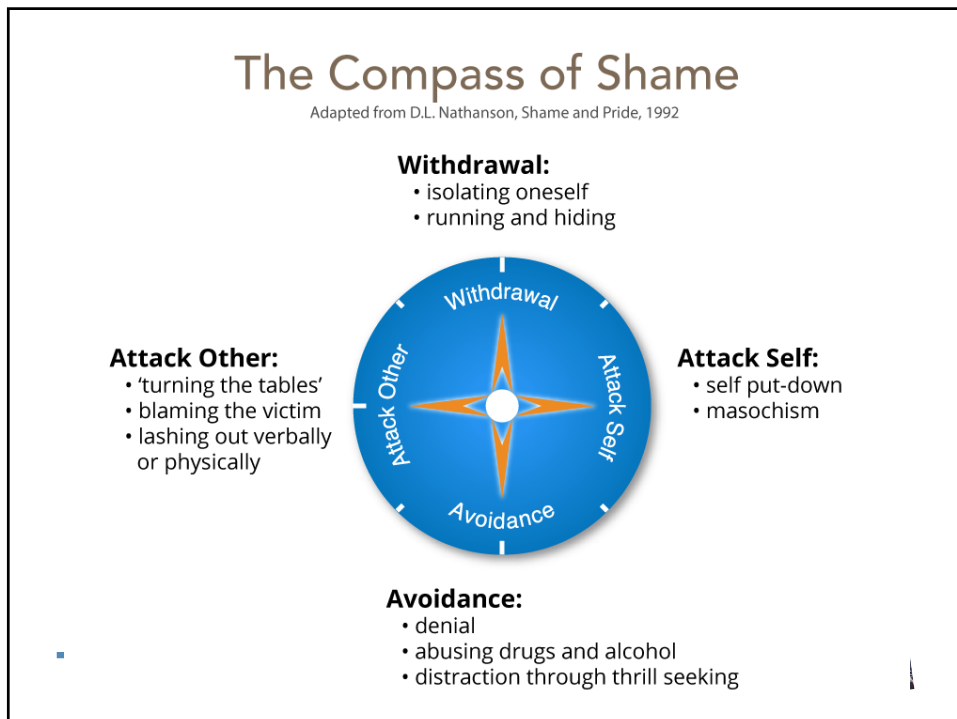


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## Re-integrative Shaming

- **Disintegrative shaming** – punishing, stigmatizing, ‘othering’, outcasting....
- **Re-integrative shaming** – disapproves of the act within a continuum of respect & rituals of forgiveness

‘it is shame in the eyes of those we respect and trust..... that is most constructive’

(Crime, Shame and Reintegration – Braithwaite)

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## Risk assessment & decision making

- How could families in their widest sense, be involved in assessment and managing risk?
- How does shame interrupt assessment and engagement?



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## Approaches to decision making?

Shouldn't they be built around...

Family not strangers?

Communities not institutions?

Children's needs not organizational requirements?

People close to children not bureaucrats & brokers

Children's culture not white corporate culture?



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## What's happening in NZ

- Around 5.1 million people live in New Zealand.
- 1.2 million children
- 25% children are Māori, 9% Pasifika
- 4400 children and young people are in care
- 55% of these are Māori
- 65% are in kinship/whānau care.
- 22,000 placed with kin outside care system
- 10,000 FGC per year



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## Aotearoa New Zealand 3 Legal Principles for Tamariki (Children)

**Mana Tamaiti** – intrinsic value and dignity of the child, derived from their identity and whakapapa

**Whakapapa** – multi generational kinship relationships, connections & places of identity

**Whanaungatanga** – responsibilities and reciprocal obligations, working together through relationships



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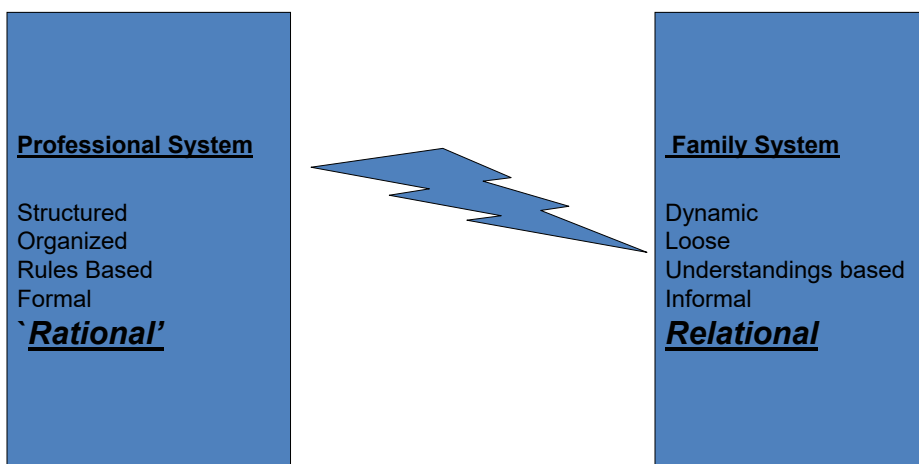
## Family Group Conferences are defined in law

- Family led decision-making
- Culturally led
- Wide definition of family
- Support from social workers and other agencies
- Independent Coordinator
- Private family time
- Find agreements, plans, solutions, reviews



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## 2 different cultures interact



Nixon and Doolan 2012



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## Positioning Families to take charge

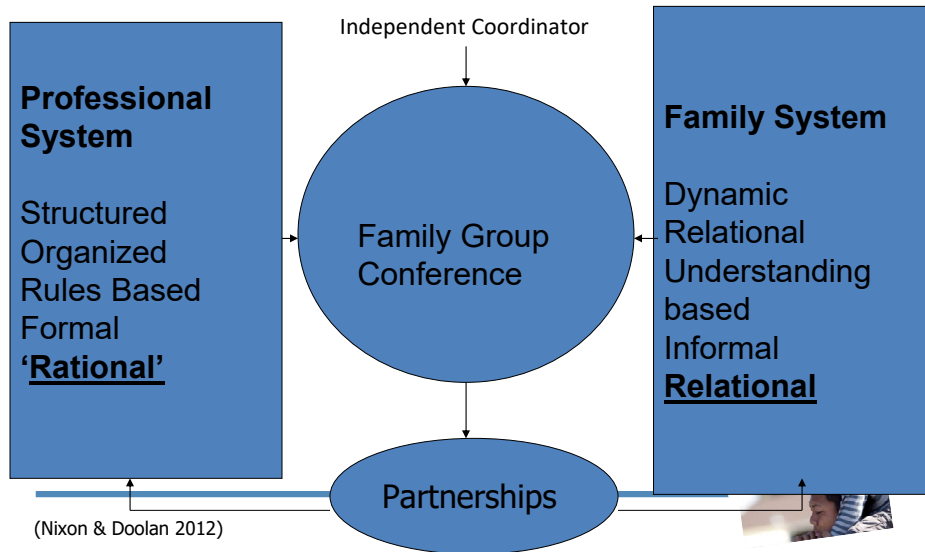
Who plays the home game?



Nixon and Doolan 2012

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### Bridging Professional and Family Systems



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## Why does this work..?

- Builds on cultural strengths and knowledge
- Emphasises family responsibility
- Encourages wide participation
- Families are experts on themselves
- Democratises decision making
- Mobilises resources and alliances & finds more protective adults
- Widens the circle - more heads, hands and hearts...



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## What the purpose of FGCs?

Family Group Conferences are not a tool, gizmo or a technique to use on families...

They are fundamentally a different way of leading and thinking about decisions in child protection.

Practiced well, they are more radical and challenging than you might have first thought...



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## When to refer for FGC?

- When would you use FGCs?
- When would you never use them?
- What are your biggest anxieties about FGCs?
- How might you navigate these?



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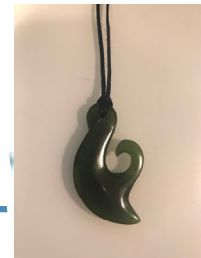
### *Te Toka Tumoana - Indigenous Framework*

- *Te Reo* - language teaches a worldview
- *Tikanga* - protocols of engagement
- *Whakapapa* - all connections & relationships
- *Whakamanawa* - lift up from oppressions



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- *Maanakitanga* - providing care & nurturing
- *Rangatiratanga* - self governance & leadership
- *Kaitiakitanga* - duty to care for & protect
- *Wairuatanga* - spirituality & knowing



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### Indigenous theory shapes practice

- Kairaranga - weaver of (local) knowledge
- Whakapapa searching - all connections & identity
- Increased Hui-a-whānau - meeting of family
- Co-facilitated FGCs
- Coordinators from Iwi / NGOs
- Use FGC early
- Co-constructed evaluation



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### International comparisons - Children in care 2022

	<u>Total Care number</u>	<u>Per 1000</u>	<u>Population</u>
Australia	46,000	8.0	26.0 mil.
England	81,000	6.7	56.0 mil.
South Australia	4,800	12.0	1.7 mil.
New Zealand	4,400	4.1	5.1 mil.



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## Youth in Detentions and Family Group Conferences per year

### Number

South Australia - **819** Youth in Detention (**SA pop. 1.7 mill**)

New Zealand - **140** Youth in Detention (**NZ pop. 5.1 mill**)

In New Zealand 3,500 Family Group Conferences for Youth Justice FGC



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## South Australia using FGCs?

1. Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 Part 3—Principles to be applied in operation of this Act Principles of intervention.

(d) *in each case*, consideration should be given to making arrangements for the care of a child or young person by way of a family group conference if possible and appropriate.

What does this mean to CP workers?

What does it mean to children & their families?



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There has been a 116.3% increase in the number of Aboriginal Children in Care in SA between 2011 to 2021

Number of children in care per 1000 in the population

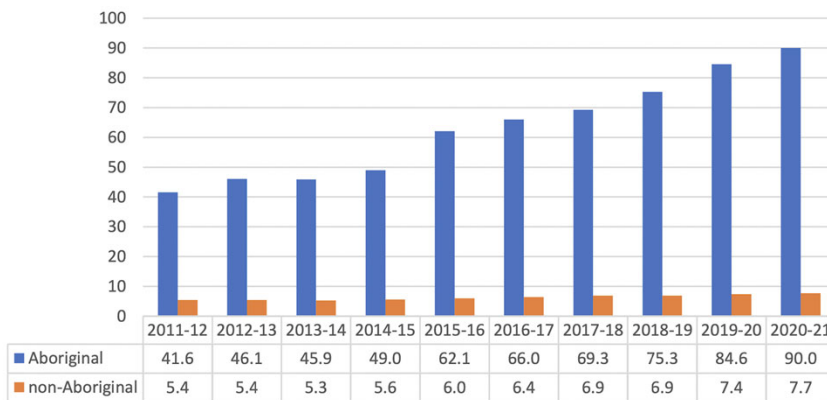
	2011-12.	2020-21
Aboriginal	41.6 per 1k	90.0 per 1k
Non-Aboriginal	5.4 per 1k	7.7 per 1k

1 in 11 Aboriginal children & young people in South Australia, are in State care.

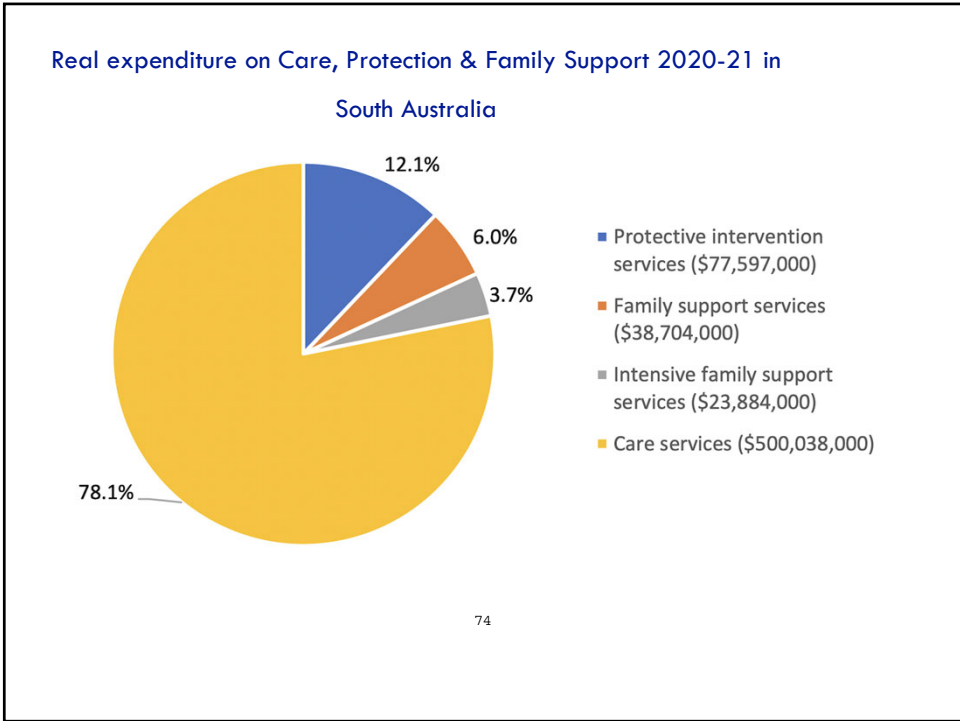


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Rate per 1000 of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in OOHc 2011-12 to 2020-21 - South Australia



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## Why?

‘There is promising and reliable evidence of approaches - Family Group Conferencing, Family Finding and Family Led Decision Making - in DCP and the sector that keep children from entering care.

*The only problem is that the number of children and families receiving these services is far too low.’*

*Trust in Culture - Kate Alexander (November 2022)*



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## FGC comparisons

Comparisons FGCs in New Zealand and South Australia  
– Number of FGCs per year

New Zealand 7,250 FGC's – Child Protection

3,500 FGC's – Youth Justice

South Australia 77 FGC's– Child Protection



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## The best referrals for FGC?

1. We have assessed the problem
2. There is a clear need for decisions about the child's safety or care
3. Early as possible in the lifecycle of the problem

Not which families - why?



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## South Australia - FGCs first 2 years in

- 150 referrals per year
- 58% reach conference - common in non-mandated
- 95% reach agreement
- 94% Children safe with family: not re-referred to DCP
- Over 90% child & family satisfaction
- No difference between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal in agreements and initial outcomes



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## 'Must dos' at FGC & freedom in process

1. Family given all the relevant information
2. Child advocate
3. Private family time
4. Child, parents, social worker agree plan
5. Review if agreed at first FGC



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## What do you notice about these statistics?

In 188 completed FGCs to date

- 369 Children participated
- 939 Protective family members identified
- 270 Other Children's Services involved
- 238 DCP workers participated



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Statements about FGCs - on scale of 1-10 - indicate your agreement (10 is high) in pairs - why do you think that?

1. Families don't want FGCs
2. FGCs take too long to organise
3. We have to make the decisions about child protection - we are accountable for children's safety
4. Timeliness is more important than quality of family engagement
5. In this context, we can't trust families to make decisions.



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## FGCs create safety and high levels of agreement

There is a remarkably high and consistent level of agreement of FGC plans, at 95% between social workers, families, and children about child safety.

- In 2020 95% of FGC plans agreed
- In 2021 95% of FGC plans agreed
- In 2022 94% FGC plans agreed



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### *Outcomes for Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal families are the same*

- a) Aboriginal families are 50% of all FGC referrals
- b) Same high levels of agreement with social workers on FGC plans as Non-Aboriginal families
- d) Aboriginal families achieve the same levels of participation & immediate and medium term outcomes

It takes longer to convene FGCs for Aboriginal Families - Why?



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### Working across the agencies

- Child and whole family focus and relationships are the 'glue'
- Professional 'Soup' or 'Fruitcake?'
- Quality of service, not number of agencies is key to good outcomes
- Family Group Conferences – organising agencies and resources around families



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## Working across the whole system?

- Children grow up in families, families make up communities, communities make up nations
- Indigenous leadership
- Child, family and community leadership
- A common language.....but the secret is in listening....
- Restorative cities – NZ, Canada, UK, Australia, USA?
- Reimagining `partnerships'.....?



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- What are your most radical ideas for improving inter agency partnership working?



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## What do you need to get going with FGCs?

What do you need from your peers and your managers?

What partnerships do you need to develop?

What areas of knowledge and skill you would like to develop?

What else would help you create change?



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When we speak we are afraid our words  
will not be heard or welcomed.

But when we are silent, we are still afraid.

So it is better to speak.

Audre Lorde - writer, feminist, civil rights activist, black, lesbian,  
mother, warrior, poet.

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'We are all visitors to this time, this place. We  
are just passing through. Our purpose here is to  
observe, to learn, to grow and to love...and  
then return home.'

Aboriginal Proverb

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