



June, 2006

Innovative approach eases pain and stress for families and children in troublesome circumstances

Family Group Conferencing calls on family to help care for child

Northwest Alberta... A new mediation program is improving the lives of children in Northwest Alberta by ensuring families are brought together to be consulted on the development of the child's service plan. Family Group Conferencing was first introduced across the region a year ago by Northwest Alberta Child and Family Services as an alternative response to necessary intervention when a child is found to be in an unsafe environment. Family members and other key influencers, like teachers and faith leaders, participate through a mediated discussion involving both relatives and other members of the child's inner circle to help put together a plan for the immediate and/or long-term well-being of the child.

"By having families participate they will be more invested in what's happening with a child. This means more successful plans – which is great news for the kids," says Gwen Villibrun, FCG facilitator and mediation program supervisor in Grande Prairie. "The main benefit of the program is firstly to the child, having that recognition that there are lots of family members who care about him or her. And being part of the decision-making process encourages families to be more committed in following through on decisions made."

So far, the program has already been introduced to some 28 families across the region, with 15 successful FGC sessions having already gone through the process and resulting in positive futures for regional children. To find out more about how this promising new method is improving the lives of children in our area for a feature report, please call one of the contacts below.

Northwest Alberta Child and Family Services delivers services including FGC on behalf of Alberta Children's Services.

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Family Group Conferencing marks a year in operation

Northwest Alberta... In the Northwest region, Family Group Conferencing was first introduced by Northwest Alberta Child and Family Services workers, who started to explore how the general philosophy of getting extended family more invested in the well-being of a child is catching on in places like New Zealand and parts of the U.S. and Europe.

After extensive research, local staff found the method would have a timely application here as a result of 2004's introduction of a new governing act leading programming and services for Alberta Children's Services, the Child and Youth Enhancement Act. Part of the emphasis of the new act is to focus heavily on keeping children both in their home communities whenever possible, and finding permanent solutions as expediently as possible for the betterment of the child in need of intervention.

Family Group Conferencing recognizes the best solution for a child in need of safety is often right in his or her own backyard in the form of extended family.

The method invites both Child and Family Services professionals working for the child, as well as all interested family, including members of the community with a direct involvement in the life of the child, to invest all of their attention and concern in the security of the child through a mediated session, during which all the information needed to begin the decision-making process begins. During a subsequent session, the family is left alone to come up with either an immediate or long-term plan for the child, which, if it meets all safety standards of Child and Family Services, is then put into place.

In all sessions, the family brings in whatever cultural or religious customs and practices they wish to enhance their experience.

Please call one of the aforementioned contacts for more details.