child, youth and family

A service of the Ministry of Social Development

Date: 13 September 2012

Security Level: **IN CONFIDENCE**

Report to: Minister for Social Development and Associate Minister for Social Development

REP/12/6/562- FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMPROVING FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES TO ACHIEVE BETTER OUTCOMES FOR NEW ZEALAND'S MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Purpose of the Report

1 This report provides a set of recommendations on how to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children in New Zealand through the improved use of family group conferences.

2 The report sets out a review of current family group conference practice and delivery and provides a summary of extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders on the current operation of family group conferences and makes recommendations on how they could be delivered, developed and improved in the future.

3 Two previous reports on family group conferences have been provided on this review, on 9 December 2011 (REP/11/11/593) and 29 February 2012 (REP/12/2/129).

Executive Summary

4 At your request I have completed a review of family group conferencing in both Care and Protection and Youth Justice across New Zealand. The review has been organised in two key phases:

4.1 Evaluating the current quality and impact of family group conferences and the strengths and weaknesses in practice and service delivery.

4.2 Identifying through analysis and consultation a comprehensive and multi-systemic framework for improving outcomes for vulnerable children through the use of family group conferences.

5 The methodology for this review has included the following activities:

5.1 An analysis of the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act (1989) and Child, Youth and Family policy and practice information.

5.2 An analysis of the current training curriculum.

5.3 A review of research and published literature on family group conferences – both national and international literature.

5.4 Identifying current best practice within the New Zealand context.

5.5 An analysis of performance data and outcome data.

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5.6 An extensive programme of consultation with practitioners and managers from a wide range of agencies – including original drafters of the 1989 legislation, the Principal Family and Youth Court Judges, both government and non-government partners, coordinators, Iwi groups and Māori leaders, and a limited number of children and young people and family members.

5.7 Consultation with international experts (both academics and practitioners) in the field of family group conferencing.

5.8 Completing a benchmarking exercise to assist in the development of national standards of practice for coordinators.

Consultation

6 Overwhelmingly a wide range of stakeholders are supportive of the family group conference as a key decision making process for children, young people and their families. Good outcomes are achieved when the process is well managed; family are well prepared and know what to expect from the conference and a range of professionals are fully engaged. With Youth Justice family group conferences, most stakeholders reported that when the victim attended or was represented, the conference had a better outcome.

7 Consultation and analysis revealed significant shortcomings in the practice of FGCs. Notably insufficient preparation of children, their family, victims and professionals in the conference process. This was partly constrained by time and resources and partly by the lack of quality practice. Attempts were made by the project team to engage with children and young people who had experienced a FGC as a part of this review, but few were forthcoming.

8 Family group conferences are now typically held during the working day and within work and school hours and nearly always in the Offices of Child, Youth and Family. These arrangements appear to be at the convenience of the agency rather than reflecting the needs of the child or family in the FGC process. If FGCs are to be more effectively engaging of children, victims and families these practices will need to change.

9 The analysis of the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act (1989) concluded that the legislation enables the delivery of quality family group conferences, but does not ensure it. In particular, some of the interpretation of the legislation has not achieved a strong interagency commitment to planning and implementing services for the most vulnerable children. The Act has been interpreted as FGCs being primarily the business of CYF and families and in doing so has hampered the contribution of other agencies to the process.

10 In addition the Act also only enables those people appointed under the State Sector Act, i.e. employees of Child, Youth and Family, to facilitate conferences. While coordinators from CYF have the power to delegate the coordinating functions of FGCs under the Act, this power has seldom been deployed.

11 Māori groups in particular report that much more could be done to engage whānau and hapū in the family group conference process. There was a strongly articulate view that whakapapa search needs to be strengthened and practice needs to reflect much more strongly Māori values and traditions. Importantly the criticism coming from consultation with Maori was that FGC practice appears to support the aspirations of the social workers primarily and practice needs to reflect a spirit of partnership between the state and families rather than a more adversarial approach which is being described by some Iwi groups and Maori leaders.

12 The analysis of the Child, Youth and Family policy and practice information showed that the policy and supporting information is in line with the aspirations of the 1989 legislation and provides guidance around the practice delivery of family group conferences, but the context of services to vulnerable children is now changing.

13 The needs of vulnerable children in New Zealand are becoming far more complex and multi-faceted. This requires that a wider range of agencies – Health, Education, Corrections, Police, iwi providers, NGOs and others – will need to be more actively engaged in the FGC process. A legal and policy framework that provides for a stronger interagency accountability and responsibility for outcomes for vulnerable children is now needed.

14 A wide range of stakeholders reported that after twenty-two years of practice, there had been a loss of focus on quality and there are opportunities to significantly enhance the management and delivery of conferences.

15 The process has become overly bureaucratic with a focus on convening conferences at the convenience of Child, Youth and Family, for example convening during working hours and using Child, Youth and Family offices as the only venue option. FGC plans were seen as too often lacking clarity, with families not understanding what they need to do after the conference. In addition plans to monitor and review FGCs were seen as weak.

16 Much more effort is required during the preparation phase. Families/whānau need to know what information will be brought to the conference and he agenda for the meeting well in advance of the conference itself, so they can come more prepared and offer strong solutions. This is not occurring in practice with many receiving invitation letters shortly before or immediately prior to the conference, leaving little time to plan travel, family contributions, let alone think of the concerns.

17 Family group conferences provide the ideal mechanism to bring both family and agencies together around the needs of children; the conference process should not be run at the convenience of any one agency but be shaped by the child's family, with agencies offering advice, support and services. To achieve this, practice needs to be reinvigorated and refocused to raise the quality of the delivery as well as oversight of the process.

Recommendations for Improving Outcomes from Family Group Conferences

18 There are a number of areas that require strengthening and improving in order to implement effective interventions for vulnerable children. These changes sit both inside and external to Child, Youth and Family.

19 A number of recommendations require joining up with the White Paper and the Youth Crime Action Plan and the recommendations from the Social Services Committee Inquiry into the identification, rehabilitation and the care and protection of child offenders.

20 Child, Youth and Family has highlighted in their strategic plan 2012-2015, Mā Mātou, Mā Tātou what is intended to change to improve outcomes for children and a number of these changes will be implemented in year one of the three-year plan.

White Paper Legislation and Governance

21 It is evident that the needs of children who have FGCs are becoming more complex and Child, Youth and Family do not have all of the answers. We know from the introduction of Gateway Assessments that nearly all children coming in to care have significant unmet health and education needs. Other agencies which include Health, Education, Police, NGOs, Iwi services

and Corrections need to take responsibility and be as accountable for outcomes for these children alongside Child, Youth and Family.

22 Legislative change is needed to establish cross government accountability for outcomes for vulnerable children. Family group conferences provide an ideal model to make decisions for vulnerable children, bringing their wider family/whānau and different agencies together into one unified planning mechanism. Legislation could commit a range of agencies to work together with families and provide services to improve outcomes.

23 Interagency policy and governance on family group conferences needs to be developed to support the use of one integrated decision-making approach for vulnerable children and young people. This would require the development of interagency protocols and practice to ensure vulnerable children have access to:

- Integrated and coordinated assessments
- A single unified plan created by a family group conference
- The provision of the full range of services and supports that they need from all applicable agencies.

24 This practice would extend across the child or young person's involvement with Child, Youth and Family with conferences being used to monitor and review the plans. Conferences would also be reconvened when a plan breaks down or new arrangements for the child are required.

25 Alternatively, amendments to the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act (1989) could make it mandatory for key government agencies – Health, Education, Child, Youth and Family, Police, to participate in family group conferences, share their information with families at these conferences and provide services in line with conference plans. All key agencies would have accountability for outcomes for those vulnerable children subject to family group conferences, relating to their area of responsibility.

26 Little change will be achieved for children and young people if their health and education needs are not met. Child, Youth and Family can strengthen practice around the process and ensure high performing coordinators s9(2)(g)(i) OIA - free and frank expression

27 The White Paper may consider interagency capacity to attend conferences and their capacity to provide services to vulnerable children.

Matters pertaining to the employment of Coordinators

28 s9(2)(g)(i) OIA - free and frank expression a number of people consulted proffered the idea coordinators sit outside of CYF Service.

29 Due to the current restrictions in the State Sector Act, this would require a legislative change. This would create a more independent service however there are a number of matters to consider including:

29.1 A potential conflict of interest with the provider having contracts for service provision as well as facilitating the conference.

29.2 The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development would still have overarching responsibilities under the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act to ensure its duties are discharged.

29.3 Consistency of training and facilitation may be compromised if managed through different providers.

29.4 Additional monitoring and reporting requirements will be required.

29.5 s9(2)(g)(i) OIA - free and frank expression

30 A second option, without legislative change, is to second staff to external Iwi and NGO providers. These staff would need to be high performing staff prepared to mentor and coach Iwi and NGO staff who could then be employed on a fixed term basis to facilitate conferences for vulnerable children.

31 These coordinators would be accountable to their agency with direct supervision from them but with the required employment relationship to facilitate conferences. This option would increase coordinators visibility in the community as well as create a wider pool of options for family and whānau.

32 The White Paper may wish to consider the issue of whether the family group conference coordinator should sit outside of Child, Youth and Family, to make them truly independent. This would require legislative change.

33 There are also potential ramifications to positioning coordinators outside of Child, Youth and Family in terms of their obligations under the Public Finance Act. This would need to be explored alongside any legislative change in this regard.

Youth Crime Action Plan and Child Offenders

34 It is evident from this review, and other work in Child, Youth and Family, that there is a need to strengthen the response to children between 10 and 14 who offend. This should be a key area of focus for the ensuing Youth Crime Action Plan.

35 The majority of this group have care and protection concerns that need addressing however they also need to be held to account for their harmful and offending behaviour.

36 Child offenders and those young people aged between 14 and 17 who are under care and protection orders in favour of the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development and those young people where the Court is considering a formal Court order, require a comprehensive approach including robust assessments and early intervention through family group conferences.

37 Akin to the interagency response required to vulnerable children under the White Paper proposals, these children and young people require an interagency commitment to attend conferences and provide the required services.

38 Coordinators often monitor their own conference plans that they have been party to. For `low level' offences this practice is commensurate with the level of offending with the emphasis

being on the family monitoring the agreement and plans and reporting back to the coordinator. However, a differentiated response for more serious offending with greater interventions and stronger social work and other agency involvement may be required for more serious problems and offences. The responses to the Social Services Committee Enquiry and the Youth Crime Action Plan may be able to consider holding other agencies, besides Child, Youth and Family, to account for the outcomes for children and young people who offend.

39 The second key focus area is the participation of victims in the conference process. Child, Youth and Family, through the Victim Interest Group, is introducing new target numbers for victim attendance at family group conferences. While Child, Youth and Family will continue to work in this area, the Youth Crime Action Plan can also include this within the scope of their work.

Child, Youth and Family Practice

40 There is no doubt family group conference practice within Child, Youth and Family requires strengthening. Feedback was strong on the perceived patchy and sometimes weak performance of coordinators and social workers in FGCs and Child, Youth and Family acknowledges the need for significant improvement in this area.

41 There are already a number of changes underway. These are:

- The production of a DVD to be used in training and with families to demonstrate the family group conference process and the importance of children's participation in the process;
- An independent evaluation of the FGC process and outcomes of family group conferences by the University of Canterbury as mentioned in the report of 29 February 2012 (attached as Appendix Two is a proposal for the research);
- Publishing best practice examples on the practice centre;
- Ongoing enhancements to policy and best practice guidance;
- The attendance and/or participation of victims at conferences;
- Policy requirements for when to convene a conference at key decision-making points in a child's life (not just once at the beginning);
- Effective engagement of a range of key agencies in providing assessment information to the conference and services to support FGC plans;
- Within the Care Strategy work there is also a proposal to use the family group conference earlier and at key decision and monitoring points along the way. This work is also linked in to the White Paper, in terms of interagency engagement and accountability for the outcomes of children in care.

42 As set out in Mā Mātou Mā Tātou Child, Youth and Family intends to achieve the following in year one (2012-2013):

- Introduce a new set of family group conference practice standards;
- An enriched training curriculum for social workers, coordinators and other agencies;

- Practice that reflects tikanga Māori with a focus on well supported whānau hui prior to conferences to ensure the whānau know what will happen and for them to think about how they can contribute to the plan;

- An increase in children and young people participating in family group conferences;

- Introduce new standards and training for quality supervision of coordinators.

43 Alongside the work underway and the work outlined in Mā Mātou Mā Tātou Child, Youth and Family recognise that the effective engagement of both extended family/whānau and other agencies in conferences is critical. It is proposed that new models of organising family group conferences are tested to maximise the engagement of family/whānau, community and other agencies. This will include:

- Working in partnership with Iwi to convene and facilitate conferences, including completing whānau searches and preparation of whānau for the conference;

- Either seconding Iwi and NGO workers in to Child, Youth and Family to facilitate conferences or vice versa, seconding coordinators to Iwi.

- Coordinators working flexible hours, including consideration of days of work in order to convene conferences in the weekend and after 5pm.

44 These options will be carefully managed and evaluated to test their effectiveness.

45 I will report back to you on progress in March 2013.

46 By that time it is anticipated the following will have been completed or progressed:

46.1 The production and release of the DVD on family group conferences to be utilised in training and engagement with children, young people and their families – to be completed

46.2 Best practice examples on our Practice Centre to assist practitioners to understand the processes of the family group conference – to be completed

46.3 The benchmarking exercise will be complete. This will enable the development of standards for quality practice and an implementation plan will be developed to begin the process of assessing coordinators in relation to quality practice. These standards will inform recruitment and ongoing performance.

46.4 These standards will also be used to inform the design of a learning and capability package for new and experienced co-ordinators. The actual package will not be completed until later in 2013.

46.5 We will be able to measure if there has been an increase in victim attendance at conferences as well as children and young people. We will provide you with information regarding this in March 2013.

46.6 We will have begun talks with s9(2)(g)(i) OIA - free and frank expression on what they may be able to do in the process and have a plan to trial these in 2013.

46.7 We will have stronger practice guidance for staff on increasing children's participation in the family group conference process, from preparation to implementation of the plan.

This will include increased utilisation of our engagement tools and possible technological applications.

46.8 The independent evaluation by the University of Canterbury will also be underway and we can report on its progress and provide a research plan.

Recommended Actions

We recommend that you:

47 **Note** the information provided to you in this report

48 **Note** the recommendations to strengthen and improve practice

49 **Note** that I will report back to you on progress in March 2013

AGREE / DISAGREE

Hon Paula Bennett Minister for Social Development	Date
Hon Chester Borrows Associate Minister for Social Development	Date
Paul Nixon Chief Social Worker Child, Youth and Family	Date

Background

1 At your request I have completed a review of family group conferencing in both Care and Protection and Youth Justice across New Zealand. The review has been organised in two key phases:

a. Evaluating the current quality and impact of family group conferences and the current strengths and weaknesses in practice and reviewing service delivery

b. Identifying through analysis and consultation a framework for improving outcomes for vulnerable comprehensive and multi-systemic group conferences. children through the use of family

2 As outlined in a previous report we agreed to complete the following work and consultation:

Part A- Understanding where we have been and where we are now

This will include the following actions:

- Literature review
- Policy and Legislative Analysis
- Research Overview - Māori and
- Best Practice Research – FGC identify areas of best practice and undertake a case analysis of FGC practice and FGC plans
- Analysis of performance data

Part B- ing F and service delivery

- Consultation with **Reinvigorating and Improv** to **GC Practice** practice and identify barriers
- Produce key stakeholders identify best standards and innovations
- Identify best material to strengthen best practice trialling new practice
- Improve practice champions and encourage family group conferences
- Leadership in Best Practice in Improve accountability and standard

3 Extensive consultation has been held across New Zealand with a wide range of stakeholders and with external international academic experts. The information gathered has been used to formulate the required ps and ongoing work programme.

4 Child, Youth and Family d ata has been analysed and attached (Appendix One) is an overview of the current pattern and trends regarding the convening and delivery of family group conferences. Five t housand new conferences is not enough in care and protection. Children and young peop le notified to Child, Youth and Family have a right to have their families involved in the mak ing of decisions about them. Where their needs meet the threshold for Child, Youth and Fa mily intervention, a conference must be held which involves their voice, their whānau and those p rofessionals who know them and can provide services to support them.

5 The review of the legislation and principles concluded that the family group conference process in law was sound and that policy was supportive in relation to Child, Youth and Family practice, however the practice is woefully behind the original intent.

6 The Coordinator workforce needs reviewing and re-training to ensure their practice meets the appropriate standards. The coordinator service requires stronger accountability, visibility and performance management so the quality of conferences are improved.

7 I have also commissioned the University of Canterbury to complete an independent evaluation of the FGC processes and outcomes. This is yet to begin and it is anticipated this will be completed by June 2013.

Themes from Consultation

8 After this extensive consultation period it is clear that there is overwhelming support from stakeholders for the family group conference to remain as the key decision making process for children, young people and their families, however Child, Youth and Family must do better to engage with family/whānau and other agencies and facilitate conferences that are inclusive of them and that work for them, not run at the convenience of the service.

9 Feedback suggests the timeframes for youth justice conferences are appropriate and allow for the provision of required information.

10 It is clear victim participation is not good enough and steps need to be taken to ensure victim preparation, negotiation and participation is improved significantly. Most stakeholders reported that where the victim attended or was represented the conference had a better outcome.

11 A clear theme from consultation is the need to strengthen our responsiveness to Māori through the conference process. Family group conferences are supported by Māori as a concept but more attention is required to ensure better outcomes for Māori children and young people. Training to improve cultural responsiveness and rethinking key practice stages of the conference, including the use of whānau hui is required. Proposals on how conferences could be organised more independently or by Iwi providers to be more culturally responsive, have been also been put forward in this paper.

12 Both internal and external stakeholders are clear that the best outcomes are achieved when family are well prepared and know what to expect from the conference. Many consulted felt much better preparation and involvement in planning the conference process was needed, including holding a whānau hui prior to the conference. This would assist whānau to understand the issues, what will happen at conference and allow them to be ready to create a plan that is achievable and relevant to the child or young person.

13 There is a need to strengthen the voices of children and young people at the conference. Whenever possible they should be present, however if they are unable to attend the social worker and coordinator must ensure their participation in other ways. Their wishes, feelings and needs have to be clearly articulated and supported where possible.

14 All key professionals and agencies involved in the conference need to present information in a simpler, understandable and integrated manner. Assessments must be integrated providing a picture of the whole child and their needs and risks. This will involve changes in practice and behaviour from professionals and service providers.

15 The importance of the contribution from other agencies to conferences is vital if we are to maximise the impact of FGCs. While Health, Education and Police are key partners, the role of other agencies and providers can also be very important. Consultation strongly supported making it mandatory for agencies to participate and ensure their information is provided to the conference. There were also strong calls for mandatory service provision for children and families from the conference with all four agencies (CYF, Health, Education, Police) being accountable for the outcomes of the child or young person post the conference.

16 Consultation also uncovered the need to move away from viewing the conference as a "CYF process". It is a joint process with family, community and professionals. A number of people

consulted proffered the idea of coordinators being based outside of CYF, or conferences being run by Iwi, NGO providers or community members.

Key Areas of Work

Delegation of authority to convene a conference and strengthening our response to Māori

17 One of the main themes from consultation was to improve FGC practice and improve engagement with families and agencies. One way suggested to achieve this was to ensure the coordinator is more visible in the community or by situating the coordinators outside of Child, Youth and Family.

18 I have had discussions with s9(2)(f)(iv) - active consideration who are keen to work in partnership with Child, Youth and Family to construct a framework for this to occur. Many consulted, including those involved in the drafting of the 1989 legislation, spoke of the original intent of coordinators, as leaders in the community.

19 I am keen to work to develop a model with Iwi to test co-facilitation or full facilitation by Iwi. This would enhance whānau and whakapapa search and the use of whānau hui to prepare whānau for conferences. This practice would take the conference out of Child, Youth and Family offices and encourage the use of tikanga māori and te reo. This could be piloted in both youth justice and care and protection conferences.

20 To further strengthen our response to Māori, consultation groups argued for the need to better train staff in the use of te reo, tikanga māori and how to work more effectively with Māori. This would include producing resources in te reo.

21 There are three possible options for changing how and who conferences are facilitated by. They are:

a. **Option One** - Strengthen internal accountability lines for coordinators - coordinators are currently managed by Site Managers (Care and Protection) and Youth Justice Managers (Youth Justice). Over time the coordinator has become an independent position often not engaging in supervision as required and operating with few reporting and monitoring mechanisms. Clear lines of accountability can be introduced including monitoring and reports to ensure activity is in line with the new practice standards being developed.

b. **Option Two** - Staff from Child, Youth and Family could be seconded to Iwi or NGOs to facilitate family group conferences. This option could also extend to staff from within Iwi and NGOs being seconded to Child, Youth and Family. This could build a stronger community presence for the FGC coordinator role and build NGO workforce capability to run and be involved in Family Group Conferences.

c. Child, Youth and Family staff would need to be high performing staff prepared to mentor and coach Iwi and NGO staff who could then be employed within Child, Youth and Family on a fixed term basis to facilitate conferences for vulnerable children.

d. These Iwi or NGO coordinators would be accountable to their agency with direct supervision from them but with the required employment relationship to facilitate conferences. This option would increase coordinators visibility in the community as well as create a wider pool of options for family and whānau.

e. This recognises that coordinators do not have to be qualified social workers, they can however have an equivalent qualification and have experience in facilitation, conflict management or mediation.

f. Under current legislation with the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989, coordinators are required to be staff appointed under the State Sector Act. Further discussions will occur with legal and workforce development to explore this option.

g. Option Three - Legislative changes could be made to have coordinators sitting outside of Child, Youth and Family to increase the independence of coordinators.

h. There is potential for a conflict of interest with an NGO or Iwi having contracts for service provision as well as facilitation. Strategies to ensure safeguards were in place would be required and there is potential for this to still be insufficient to manage the conflict.

i. The CE of MSD would still have overarching responsibilities under the CYP&F Act to ensure its duties are discharged.

j. Consistency of training and facilitation might be compromised if coordinators are within a variety of settings within the community

k. Additional monitoring and reporting requirements would be required for NGO and Iwi.

l. s9(2)(g)(i) OIA - free and frank expression

Multi Agency Work

22 Consultation emphasised the value of mandatory involvement - both in the conference itself and in post conference services and support – of a range of agencies but especially Health, Education, Child, Youth and Family and the Police. There is a need to develop integrated assessments to support family decision making and this will be supported somewhat by the introduction of Gateway Assessments.

23 The family group conference provides the ideal mechanism to organise services and supports around a vulnerable child or young person. The conference was seen as an excellent way to bring together family/community (informal) and professional/agency (formal) systems around children. Increasingly the needs of vulnerable children in New Zealand are being understood as complex and multi-faceted. This will require that a range of agencies – Health, Education, Police, Iwi providers, NGOs and others are more engaged in the family group conference process. A legal and policy framework supporting interagency accountability and responsibility for outcomes for vulnerable children in this decision making was seen as needed.

Child, Youth and Family Practice

24 Overwhelmingly the consultation focused on improving Child, Youth and Family practice, as this is at the crux of the matter. This included a particular focus on the following areas:

a. Setting standards for quality practice, ensuring adherence to the standards and performance management of staff who are not performing;

b. Increasing victim attendance and participation at conferences;

c. Ensuring the child or young person is present at the conference or if they can not be, their views are visible and they are adequately represented;

d. Setting timeframes for holding a care and protection conference;

e. Ensuring appropriate training, support and leadership is provided, including formalised gatherings of staff across geographic areas for peer support and training;

f. Flexible working hours, changes to the days of work and venue options outside of Child, Youth and Family buildings

g. Ensuring the management structure is appropriate and meets the needs of coordinators and the organisation;

h. Ring-fencing resources for conferences.

25 The voices and choices of victims and their participation in the family group conference needs extensive improvement. A greater emphasis on the preparation and empowerment of victims must be achieved. This would require training, support and new practice standards to maximise victim choice and participation.

26 There is also a need for regular evaluation of practice and to measure outcomes for children and young people post the family group conference.

27 Along with evaluation, regular feedback is required from participants which will be used to improve practice and assure ourselves we are achieving good outcomes for children and young people through having had a conference.

Training, Accreditation and Support

28 Much of the consultation focused on the training and management of the coordinators. Child, Youth and Family is building a training programme that will introduce a system of accreditation for coordinators.

29 Using the information from the benchmarking exercise new minimum standards of practice alongside a new training curriculum will be developed. Accreditation will include an induction period, observing conferences, being observed and peer review.

30 The management and support for coordinators will also be reviewed alongside the introduction of the accreditation process.

Resources

31 A review of the resourcing for the delivery of Family Group Conferences is required – the current resource deployment is limiting the number of conferences and reviews being held, the extent to which wider family can engage in the process and the quality of the conferences. The creation of efficiencies, both cashable and non-cashable, will be explored in this review, and

consideration given to what other decision making processes can be taken out to create capacity.

32 The review will include what other resources can be deployed to support conferences including use of existing infrastructure and the use of innovative technology – family search databases, video conferencing and computer software programmes to increase the participation of hard to reach groups - to maximise their impact.

Research and Evaluation

33 Research and evaluation needs establishing. It is anticipated the University of Canterbury research outcomes from family group conferences in both Care and Protection and Youth Justice will improve our knowledge and provide ideas for further practice improvement. Little research has been done in New Zealand to date on family group conferences and research will need to focus on the following areas:

- Longer term outcomes for children and young people and what makes a difference to these outcomes;
- The involvement of victims and children and young people in the process;
- The most effective means of engaging Māori whānau, hapū and iwi and achieving better results for tamariki Māori;
- What makes interagency working with family group conference most effective.

34 In addition to this independent research, regular reporting mechanisms will be established to provide a more comprehensive data set on practice and outcomes of conferences through performance management data. This would help guide the interagency and strategic governance of the work.

Next Steps

35 This report will be shared with the relevant General Managers, Ministry of Social Development, responsible for the White Paper and the Youth Crime Action Plan to consider incorporating the recommendations into their work.

36 Child, Youth and Family will complete the work already under way and focus on the year one achievements as outlined in Mā Mātou Mā Tātou. This will include the work with Iwi and providers on working together to facilitate conferences.

37 I will work with the University of Canterbury to ensure the completion of the independent evaluation and also use the international panel to advise on ongoing work.

38 I will work towards incorporating the wider recommendations mentioned in this report in to the relevant Child, Youth and Family business groups' work programmes.

39 Ongoing consultation will occur with Iwi and other relevant parties.

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