



# FGC & Lifelong Links Network Newsletter

Spring 2022

## Family Group Conference (FGC)

This is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for and with a child. It is often used to address child welfare concerns. Also known as FGDM (family group decision making) in Scotland.

## Lifelong Links

Is for children in care, working with them, to help identify and find relatives and other supportive adults, in order to build a lasting support network for the child or young person.



Pia, aged 18 years old, wanted to participate in Lifelong Links to help her discover and find out more about her family connections. When Pia was aged five, she was sent by relatives in her country of origin, to live in the UK with extended family members.

Although Pia remembers being well cared-for by her family, this arrangement didn't work out, and at the age of seven Pia entered care where she stayed until the present day.

Pia and her Lifelong Links coordinator, Naina, were matched as they share the same ethnicity and Naina has a good understanding of Pia's culture. Pia said that she felt isolated from her cultural identity and her roots, so Naina's understanding helped a lot.

Pia's priority was to connect with her mother whom she had not spoken to since she was five years old. She also wanted to reconnect with the family she lived with for two years when she first came to the UK.

Naina and Pia first mapped out the family and network that Pia knew about and used pictures and discovered people's names to fill in the gaps. This helped Pia visualise who her family were and how she was connected to them. Pia felt that her network should also include her Independent Reviewing Officer, her social worker, and her coordinator.

*Turn to page 2 to  
continue reading.*

Naina found Pia's UK-based family only to be told that her father and stepmother had died several months earlier. With support, Pia took some time to come to terms with this news before choosing to resume Lifelong Links.

When Pia was ready, Naina brought Pia and her UK-based family together in a family group conference (FGC). The family were eager to reconnect with Pia and welcome her again into the family. Pia is now very much a family member, visiting their homes, joining celebrations and regularly spending time with similar-aged relatives.

Following the FGC, Naina managed to connect with Pia's mother. Pia's mother was overjoyed to hear news of her daughter after so many years and asked to speak to Pia without delay. Careful planning and support facilitated this emotional first phone call. Pia and her mother now speak regularly, and Pia is learning her mother's language having lost the ability to speak this whilst living in care.

Pia's Lifelong Links coordinator Naina travelled to Pia's home country in the spring of 2021. Naina met Pia's mother and family and returned with photographs and stories. Pia's mother said they had all been "heartbroken at losing a niece, cousin, granddaughter in the UK care system" and were "mad with happiness" to hear that Pia is safe and well. They were eager to meet her and promised to be available to help her in her adult life.

In December 2021 the Lifelong Links service with support from Pia's Through Care worker and Team arranged a trip for Pia to meet her mother and family, with Naina accompanying her. Pia reflects that this trip was a milestone in her life. She had initial hesitations and fears that too much time had lapsed for her to form family bonds, however it was

quite the opposite. Pia spent 14 days in her mother's home country and relished every day engaging with her mother and extended family members irrespective of the language and cultural differences.

Naina facilitated the reunion and supported Pia to understand the traditions, customs, and language. Lifelong Links has helped Pia to reconnect and develop strong links with her family in the UK and her country of birth. Pia feels this has reduced her feelings of isolation and lack of identity. Pia's UK family helped her to re-establish her identity within the family network. This was a significant step considering the duration she has been in care and the recent death of her father and stepmother.

Pia is grateful that she had the opportunity to meet her overseas family. Pia feels the missing pieces are finally coming back together since meeting her mother. Pia is also able to recall many childhood memories and places that she had visited from when she was young. Pia describes how she was able to recall repressed childhood memories of long forgotten family elders as well as smells and foods.

Since meeting her mother, Pia says that her sense of belonging, and identity has strengthened and that the relationship with her mother continues to grow with each phone call especially now that they both have created happy memories together through this trip.

## New reports recommending the use of

## family group conferences

### **Commission on Young Lives: A new partnership with parents.**

Family Rights Group provided oral evidence to the Commission on Young Lives inquiry and its Chief Executive extensively quoted in this new report in relation to the value of kinship care and the importance of increased support.

As a consequence of our evidence, the Commission recommendations include:

- A new 'entitlement' for families to be involved in decision-making about their support through a Family Group Conference when they are referred to statutory services for help
- A national support programme to extend kinship care for teenagers at risk, including the replication of programmes such as Family Rights Group Lifelong Links programme.

The Commission's earlier report also highlights Camden's Family Group Conference service.

### **Born into Care**

The [new research study](#) explores compulsory intervention at birth from the perspectives of parents as well as professionals in children's social care, health services and the courts.

The [draft practice guidelines](#) have been developed by a team led by Claire Mason at Lancaster University. These are now being piloted with research sites. The draft guidelines do need further refining and further research is being planned (in conjunction with Family Rights Group) with fathers, black and minority ethnic parents, parents with learning disabilities and kinship carers. Family Rights Group will also be formally responding to the draft guidelines and would encourage local FGCs services also to respond.

Amongst the recommendations set out in the draft guidelines is that

- Following an immediate needs assessment, a family group conference and a family plan are developed. This seeks to identify ways in which the family network can offer help and support to address the identified needs and concerns and work towards the identified goals. The family plan is integral to any child in need or child protection plan.
- A review family group conference/family network is held in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy to consider progress and any remaining concerns regarding the health and well-being of the unborn baby and the parents.
- Timing of child protection and Public Law Outline processes allows adequate space for parents to prepare emotionally and practically for a possible separation following birth and consider alternative carers for their baby

Family Rights Group has sat on the advisory committee for this research and the new guidelines. Angela Frazer-Wicks has been intimately involved in working with the birth mothers, both as part of the research and in informing draft guidelines for health, social care and court professionals.



# News from the network

## Brothers and sisters project

Family Rights Group are delighted to announce that we were successful in our joint bids with Perth & Kinross Council and North Lanarkshire Council to The Promise Partnership - Getting it right for Brothers and Sisters (an investment from The Cattnach Trust, STV Children's Appeal and the Scottish Government). This means that Family Rights Group will be able to offer training and consultancy to assist Perth and Kinross Council to strengthen their current Lifelong Links service and help North Lanarkshire set up a new Lifelong Links service.

The funding was made available following the recent introduction of new in legislation in Scotland (Part 13 of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Looked After Children (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021). This means that local authorities have a duty of to ensure siblings are supported to stay together, where appropriate. Where it is not appropriate for brothers and sisters to live together, steps should be taken to help them stay in regular touch with each other and to nurture their relationships.

### Dates for your diary:

#### FGC & Lifelong Links Network meetings

Wednesday 15th June  
Wednesday 14th September  
Wednesday 7th December

#### Lifelong Links managers practice discussions

Wednesday 30th March  
Wednesday 18th May  
Friday 8th July  
Wednesday 17th August  
Thursday 1st September  
Wednesday 19th October  
Wednesday 14th December

#### FGC managers practice discussions

Wednesday 6th April  
Wednesday 4th May  
Wednesday 1st June  
Wednesday 6th July  
Wednesday 3rd August  
Wednesday 7th September  
Wednesday 5th October  
Thursday 3rd November  
Friday 9th December

**For information on any of the events above, including information on how to book, please contact Jordene Sewell ([jsewell@frg.org.uk](mailto:jsewell@frg.org.uk))**

## New research project into family group conferences

The CASCADE research centre at Cardiff University has just started work on an ambitious four-year research project on family group conferences, funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The main aim is to increase understanding of the quality and effectiveness of family group conferences. The project's name is Family VOICE and they have a webpage [here](#).

The research questions are: (1) How widely are FGCs on offer in England and Wales and what are they used for? (2) What do families and practitioners think affects how successful FGCs are? (3) How do the quality of FGCs and variation in how they are used affect families' experience and what happens to the family over the next year? (4) What happens over the next two years to families who have had an FGC? Is there a difference in their use of services, compared with families who have not taken part in FGCs, and what does this cost?

An on-line survey will be sent shortly to local authorities to get an up to date picture of which local authorities currently run or commission FGCs and some insight into those services. The survey has been constructed in consultation with Family Rights Group and it would be extremely helpful if FGC managers could complete the survey.

The research team is working with families who have experience of FGCs and practitioners, to work out the best approach for measuring FGC quality and what factors influence how well things work out. This will result in a co-designed questionnaire which they hope several FGC services will use in their routine practice. Families will be asked to fill this in just before a conference, a month later and again a year later. This will help understand what difference quality of FGC makes to families' experience and outcomes. If you'd like to know more, please contact Jonathan Scourfield ([scourfield@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:scourfield@cardiff.ac.uk)).

### Award winning Lifelong Links... almost!

Lifelong Links was nominated for the Youth Relationship Award at the Children and Young People Now Awards. We were competing with some tremendous programmes. We didn't end up winning but are very proud that we were "highly commended". Sadly no fancy awards show to attend but there was a very enjoyable online event.

**Children &  
Young People Now  
Awards 2021**

**Finalist**





## Calling all kinship carers

Please take our survey and share your experiences with MPs and Peers.



The All Party Parliamentary Group on Kinship Care, facilitated by Family Rights Group, is conducting an inquiry into access to legal aid and advice for kinship carers and prospective kinship carers.

The group has held two oral evidence sessions. The first in February with kinship carers and a children's law solicitor from Ridley & Hall. The second this week with The Law Society, Resolution and Lawyers in Local Government. Written minutes and recordings from the session will be published on the group's [website](#) soon.

Family Rights Group is also facilitating a survey of kinship carers to inform the group's inquiry. A direct link is available [here](#) and the APPG has tweeted it [here](#). Please share the survey on your own social media channels and with kinship carers in your networks so that the APPG can hear from as many kinship carers as possible.

The inquiry is also accepting written evidence and a submission form can be requested from Jordan, our public affairs manager, who runs the APPG's secretariat: [jhall@frg.org.uk](mailto:jhall@frg.org.uk).

**The deadline for submissions is 4th April.**

## Introducing our new Chair of trustees: Angela Frazer-Wicks

I am Angela Frazer-Wicks, I am a birth parent, having lost my eldest two children to adoption back in 2004 predominantly due to domestic abuse. I am also mother to a ten year old daughter who has had no local authority involvement and shortly before Christmas last year I was reunited with my eldest son.



I first became involved with Family Rights Group back in 2008 when they invited me to co-chair an international conference, after hearing me speak about my experiences at an event on adoption. Family Rights Group understood way back then the importance of involving those with lived experience.

Five years later in 2013 I was proud to be a founding member of their parents' panel, which brings together parents with lived experience of the child welfare and family justice system including birth parents, adopters and parents who were once in care themselves. Family Rights Group also runs a kinship care panel. T. Over the years we have held many joint panel events

and panel members have informed all the work of Family Rights Group, spoken at international events and become an intrinsic part of Family Rights Group. So much so that 50% of the board of trustees is made up of people with lived experience.

On 11th November 2021, 13 years on from that first conference, I was honoured to be appointed Chair of the Board of Trustees. Family Rights Group have demonstrated the importance of partnership working, leading by example and setting the bar for others to follow.

They understand that whilst we may not want the perspective we have, it is a unique and valuable insight that can help shape policy and practice. Our experiences can help educate and inform, and most of all we have a right to be seen and heard, not just within the context of proceedings but by the wider system as a whole. Over the years I have seen a much needed shift in the way families are viewed and seen them begin to be valued and rightly so.

In addition to my role with Family Rights Group, I am currently co-chair of Cafcass Learning and Improvement Board looking at improving the way they work with families where there has been domestic abuse, I also sit on the Advisory Board for their newly formed Family Forum. I am on the Experts by Experience Board of the current Independent Review into Children's Social Care in England. I work with BASW on their 80/20 campaign looking at improving relationship based practice, I sit on the Advisory Board for the Born into Care Study at Lancaster University and deliver training to practitioners across the country.

Whilst there is still an enormous way to go and huge changes are still needed, the progress I have seen genuinely gives me hope for the future, one where families are involved not because someone says they must be but because all those involved in the child welfare and family justice system finally understand why we should be.

Visit [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)  
to find out more



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# Four Nations: Network event

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*In June 2021 Family Rights Group hosted the first ever four nations Family Group Conference Network event involving presentations from policymakers and FGC practitioners from Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales. The on-line event was attended by 120 participants. It was chaired in the morning by Paul Nixon, former chief social worker New Zealand and in the afternoon by Kevin Makwikila a member of Family Rights Group's parents' panel and a trustee of Family Rights Group.*

*Each country provided one policy presentation followed by three practice presentations reflecting innovative work they are doing. This was followed by small virtual groups to allow reflection on what participants had heard.*

*We are hugely indebted to all the presenters and the two chairs who gave their time generously. We should also give a big thank you to the members of the planning group from each country who took on the task of organising their country's presentations at such short notice.*

*The event began with Paul greeting us in Māori, singing a Māori song and sharing his experience of FGCs in New Zealand. New Zealand are conducting approximately 10000 FGCs a year, 6000 of which are care and protection FGCs. Paul emphasised the importance of the independence of the coordinator as a 'weaver of knowledge' and warned against over bureaucratising or over proceduralising FGCs.*

## England

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### The English context to FGC practice

*Cathy Ashley; Chief Executive, Family Rights Group*

Cathy set the context to FGC practice in England. There are more children in the care system now than any time since 1985 and there has been an increase in the number of newborns coming into care. The 2018 Care Crisis Review explored the factors, including increasing poverty and increasingly risk adverse practice, which contribute to the high number of children in care. The pandemic has intensified the challenges facing families and the system. Beyond the pandemic there are concerns that local authorities having delivered remote child protection conferences and FGCs will be tempted to take short cuts and favour organisational expedience over investing in face-to-face relationship-building.

On a more positive note, the Public Law Working Group (<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PLWG-SGO-Final-Report-1.pdf>) has promoted strength-based practice including FGCs and increasingly family voices are being heard and influencing services. An Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England has been announced by the Government and Family Rights Group is keen that FGC services inform the thinking of the Review.

### For more information

(click links below)

- [FGC & Lifelong Links Network](#)
- [Lifelong Links](#)



## **Lifelong Links**

*Dawn Walsh; Practice Adviser, Family Rights Group*

Dawn described our journey in trialing and supporting the roll out of Lifelong Links in local authorities in England, Scotland and now Wales.

Lifelong Links was developed by Family Rights Group and first trialed in local authorities in England in 2017. An independent Lifelong Links coordinator works with a child in care to find out who is important to them, who they would like to be back in touch with and who they would like to know. The coordinator searches for these people, using a variety of tools and techniques. They then bring the network together at the Lifelong Links family group conference to make a plan with and for the child, which the local authority supports to ensure these relationships continue to grow.

The local authority should integrate the Lifelong Links plan into the young person's care plan and social workers should work with the young person and their support network during their childhood and transition to adulthood. Further information about this work including how you can commission support from FRG in developing a Lifelong Links service is available here

<https://frg.org.uk/lifelong-links/what-is-lifelong-links/>

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*Interesting and positive development for children who are looked after. Love that it helps children to retain some sense of identity with families and helps them to make sense of their journey.*

## **FGCs with young people missing from care**

*Clare Barton Team Manager & Mark Buckingham Senior Coordinator, South & East Kent Social Connections Service*

Clare and Mark described a case in Kent to illustrate the practice and demonstrate outcomes. They emphasised the importance of been able to respond quickly to referrals and how some young people run away from care motivated by a wish to return to their family.

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*Amazing work. shows how FGC can be used and so flexible*

## **Islington's innovative community-based FGC work**

*Angela Coley and Laretta Scott, Islington FGC service.*

Angela and Laretta presented on the work they are undertaking on two estates in Islington using community-based family group conferences alongside other supports to deal with young people at risk of gang involvement. Angela and Laretta emphasized how a 'rights based' approach is central to the work, seeing families and children as partners. They described how they initially implemented the work on one estate and then seeing the benefits went further to roll out the work on a second Islington estate.

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*Really impressed with the level of skill and adaptive working and how great the outcomes were. Really inspiring stuff!*



## Northern Ireland

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### The value of FGCs in Northern Ireland

*Koulla Yiasouma; the Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland*

Koulla spoke eloquently about how valuable FGCs have been in Northern Ireland and how we collectively have not done enough to promote the value of this work.



*Sounds like some fantastic work is being carried out in Northern Ireland, and great to hear from a children's commissioner who is so passionate about the FGC process. She was absolutely right in regard to us not always blowing our own trumpet, and this was food for thought for me*

*Great reaction from Koulla Yiasoum on how social work practice has changed since she qualified and how FGDM makes total sense "doing with not to"*

### FGCs with Older People Services

*Ethel McNeill & Carole Kirk from the Northern Trust*

Ethel and Carole gave an overview of the project, the outcomes achieved and next steps in delivering this work. They described some difficulties with low referral rates with referrals often coming at the point of crisis in families. They felt that some families were concerned that if they were to engage in the FGC then other professional supports may be withdrawn. They talked about the importance of adhering to the same key principles as child welfare FGCs: independence, working to the timeframe of the family, ensuring there is private family time. Some of the differences they described focused on were issues of consent where there are mental health issues and use of mental capacity tools to help determine capacity. Carole has completed some research entitled 'Restorative Approaches with families in Elder Abuse cases' and alongside Ethel has coauthored a report on the project.

*Very interesting work - it is clear that FGC can be utilised in so many ways - it seems we are a very underused and very underfunded.*

*Always felt that FGCs would be really beneficial in working with vulnerable adults, I feel it is a major gap in many authorities.*

*Great pilot and really making roads into embedding FGCs in Adults Social Care, great feedback too!*



## The use of FGC is for early intervention work

*Davina Clements, Team Manager for the Barnardos Southern Trust*

Davina explained that the service takes referrals direct from the Family Support Hub. The early intervention coordinator is often the first point of contact for families in a crisis or needing support and the FGC is key to help them plan in a way that for many families is less stigmatizing.

“ Families can set the agenda so therefore very empowering. Good links with agencies needed. Good for families who would prefer to avoid getting involved with authority.

## Using person centered tools in Family Decision Making

*Julie Allen & Kim Leebody, the Belfast & South Eastern Trust*

The service recognises the importance of the coordinator's use of self and particularly interesting was the use of one-page profiles for all coordinators so that children and young people and other team members, have a clear understanding of who they are. The profiles are summarised into a one-page team profile. They also described other tools they use with families such as the family shield, which help keep the child at the centre.

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*Use with a team profile very powerful. We need to be more creative when working with people, this is a lovely tool to do this*



**We are recruiting!**

There are a number of roles available.  
Visit [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk) for more info.





*Kevin Makwikila began the afternoon session by sharing a little of his own experience of the value of FGCs in his life and his involvement with Family Rights Group.*

## Wales

### An overview of the Welsh context

*Sean O'Neil; Children in Wales*

There has been a 30% increase in the number of children in the care system in the last 10 years and the Welsh government has developed a programme aimed at reducing the number of children coming into the care system. As part of this they have provided some financial support for the development and growth of FGCs in Wales.

### How FGC can be used effectively for expectant families who have either had a child removed or are at risk of their baby being removed?

*Rachel Jenkins, FGC facilitator Newport Family Support Service and Bridget Barnet, FGC coordinator Monmouthshire council*

Rachel and Bridget presented the collaborative work between the 'Baby and Me' and the FGC services in Newport. The service was described as a wraparound service for vulnerable parents. Most parents referred to the service had a previous child removed. Both services are co-located, and referrals are made from the 'baby and me' service direct to the FGC service. The aim of the service is to assist children to return home or to remain at home with parents. Rachel and Bridget gave some brief outcome evidences with referrals leading to continued or a renewal of parental care of babies.

**“** *Importance of recognising people change and grow over the their lives and if they have had children removed before that doesn't mean they can't look after their child now, albeit in a supportive and safe way'*

*As a service we experience such late referrals for unborn babies which makes it almost impossible to give the time that is needed for families to make plans. This has inspired us as a service, we are already texting each other about what we can do to make links with local mother and baby services.*

*Shocking that the process has been so brutal in the removal of babies with no opportunity for families to come together (court issue order/baby removed in same day!)*



## Early intervention and FGCs

*Frankie Norcross, Senior practitioner, Families First, Flintshire Meeting Service and Maureen Japp FGC and Mediation Service Manager, Y Bont*

Frankie and Maureen began by introducing the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 and how this has been instrumental in the development of Early Intervention and Preventative Services in Wales. They explored how FGCs fit into an early intervention approach demonstrating that the principles of the Act (Wellbeing, Voice and control, Prevention and Early intervention, Partnerships) fit well with those of FGCs. The Welsh government is putting resources and funding behind early intervention and each local authority can apply for funding to develop and deliver services to meet local needs.



*Wonderful to see EIP use of FGCs and that families take the skills they learn from this experience forward into their futures*

*Self-referrals - sound a great way of working*

## Restorative approaches to Family Group Meeting Services

*Melanie Thomas-Wilcox and Jim McGrath TGP Cymru*

Melanie and Jim discussed the importance of restorative approaches when preparing families who are in conflict for a Family Group Meeting. They are currently using this approach across six Welsh local authorities. They gave examples of how changing language, and use of simple practice techniques can enhance understanding, repair relationships, and result in more positive outcomes for families. Since receiving Welsh government funding they have had 84 referrals with a 93% take up of the service with very positive feedback.



*Restorative FGCs and mediation Love it, love it, Love it!*

*Really like this restorative stuff and the extra processes and interventions used in the preparation stage*

*Mediation where parental separation and conflict is having a negative impact of children's life, so powerful and good practice.*





## Scotland

### The legislative & policy context of FGDM in Scotland

*Janet McCullough, Head of Service, South Glasgow*

Janet talked about Glasgow's remarkable journey, In 2015 Glasgow had 600 children on child protection plans, 1400 children in care and 10,000 cases open to Glasgow social workers. Senior managers decided that some significant cultural changes were required. They were particularly concerned about how money was being spent, 70% of young people in care were placed out of Glasgow, with only 2/3 of young people returning home. The service decided that FGDM could be central to transform this picture. They took four social workers out of social work teams in the north-east of the city and trained them in FGDM. They now have 20 full time staff across the city delivering FGDM and a focus on transforming practice. The looked after population has reduced from 1400 to 794 in this period and FGDM has been central to achieving this.



*Glasgow have really been honest about what wasn't working and the results are amazing, great learning from each other and sharing practice*

*Interesting policy and legal framework in Glasgow (& Scotland). Very honest about the task facing Glasgow 5 years ago, transformational change*

### How Scotland has taken a national approach to supporting and developing FGDM services

*Sally Wassel, Chairperson of the Scottish Steering Group*

Sally outlined the Scotland-wide approach to supporting FGDM and help in developing practice. She set out the aims and objectives of the Scottish FGDM steering group, which has representation from both local authority and third sector agencies. She described some of the key tasks facing the group including the production of practice guidance reflecting key legal and policy changes in Scotland reflective of the recent resurgence of interest in FGDM in Scotland. Amongst other achievements they have developed a shared data format for Scottish services to capture outcomes of FGDM.



*Great passion from the Steering Group Chair about the development and take up of FGDM across Scotland.*

*Inspiring to see a collaborative national approach. This can only support the visibility and value*

## Where FGDM sits alongside The Promise

Margot Thomson, Glasgow City Council and Sara Ali, Children 1st

Margot and Sara described the root and branch Independent Care Review in Scotland. In the development of 'The Promise' over 5500 people have been consulted over 3 years with an ongoing implementation period lasting until 2030. The Promise Scotland is now responsible for driving the work of change demanded by the findings of the Independent Care Review. There are funding streams as part of the change programme, with FGDM featuring as an important element in delivering the Review's vision.



*Really interesting policy framework and like the Implementation Team, is there till 2030, that's commitment*

## Knowledge Exchange & Recognition Matters

Heather Rush, City Edinburgh Council

Heather described how the Knowledge Exchange has worked in Scotland. In 2019 six women with different practice and lived experiences came together to create a knowledge exchange to improve experiences and outcomes for children and families in child welfare and protection. 9 months later they hosted a seminar for people across Scotland and launched a film showing the lived experience of one parent. The film was shown at the event.



*I love the bringing together of knowledge and experience from practitioners and parents - great partnership work*

**The day was rounded up by Sean Haresnape briefly summarizing the outstanding FGC work taking place across the four nations. Participants were also invited to feedback on the day:**



*Excellent day, a brave step to bring 4 Nations together but it really paid off. This should encourage us to share more; such a wealth of knowledge and experience.*

*Fantastic to hear how FGC's are being carried out in different areas and the different groups that are being targeted. Amazing work going on and worthwhile in all areas!!!*

*So many inspiring projects and people. Gives coordinators a real buzz about their work*

*Nice to meet all these people - just inspiring in a time when we have all felt alone.*

**Report written up by Sean Haresnape  
Family group conference and Lifelong Links practice lead at Family Rights Group**

## Post graduate certificate in family group conferences: Deanna Edwards

Since 2020 the University of Salford and Family Rights Group have been offering a post-graduate certificate in FGCs. Our second cohort are just about to graduate and so far, we have had 23 people successfully complete the course.

The course is open to anyone who works in a paid or voluntary capacity in an FGC service or can access some work experience in a service. It is online with support from experienced tutors from both Family Rights Group and the University of Salford. All our tutors have significant practice experience in FGCs and are experienced teachers and trainers with a passion for FGC practice.

We are now recruiting for September 2022. For details of how to apply click [here](#) or for an informal chat contact Deanna Edwards, programme lead on [d.edwards@salford.ac.uk](mailto:d.edwards@salford.ac.uk)

'The FGC course has supported me in my practical work as I am now able to critically reflect on my practice.'

'I have enjoyed this course and I can see how this has impacted positively on my career.'

'The PGCert has given me confidence in my job role and promoting the FGCs unique way of working with families.'



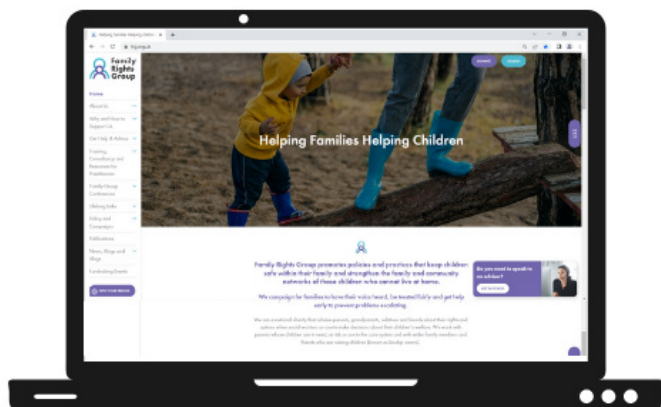
### Our Families, Our Voices “Working together for the benefit of our children”



We hosted the above event on the 16th March, it was an evening of talks, performances and conversation curated and led by young people, parents and kinship carers with lived experience of the child welfare system in tandem with practitioners and senior children's services leaders.

It will soon be available to watch again online [here](#).

# FRG website and advice content



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

We have upgraded our [website](#) to provide families and professionals with comprehensive and easily accessible advice content. There is a wealth of information that is useful to FGC practitioners, local authority decision makers and the families, including sections for [parents-to-be](#), [mothers](#), [fathers](#), and [kinship carers](#).

Recently added content includes a briefing developed by our Principal Legal Adviser, Caroline Lynch, on [financial support and special guardianship](#). This is useful reading for FGC practitioners and decision makers who are working with special guardians or prospective special guardians.

## Have you watched our latest Lifelong Links films?

Click the thumbnails to watch now



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# Major expansion of Lifelong Links initiative for children and young people in care

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More children and young people looked after in the care system will now have the opportunity to take part in Lifelong Links and reconnect with relatives and friends.

The Lifelong Links approach supports children and young people in care to build positive, lasting relationships they can rely on into adulthood. It has been implemented in 22 local authorities across the UK and over 2000 children and young people have benefitted to date. New funding will see the approach expanded across North West and South East England, and to three additional local authorities in Scotland. The first two Welsh local authorities began to implement Lifelong Links in 2021.

Family Rights Group designed Lifelong Links in response to research findings that too often the care system breaks or disrupts relationships for children and young people in care, leaving them isolated with few social contacts to rely on practically and emotionally.

An Oxford University evaluation found that Lifelong Links leads to increased placement stability and 78% of young people reported a greater sense of identity and belonging. Average relationships increase from 7 to 26.

Family Rights Group have been successful in collaborating with local authorities on a major expansion of the approach.

Funding from the Department for Education's 'Children's Social Care Covid-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better Fund' means FRG are now working with additional local authorities in North West and South East England to establish or expand family group conference services and Lifelong Links. Family group conferences bring together a child's wider family to make a plan for the child where there are concerns about their welfare. This can help avert a child needing to enter the care system.

Moreover, funding from the Promise Partnership will see the approach implemented in three additional local authorities in Scotland, taking the total to eight.



## **Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group, said:**

*"Being able to turn to family and friends when we need support is something many of us take for granted. Too often for children and young people looked after in the care system, those relationships have been broken leaving them socially isolated. During the pandemic, that lack of a support network has been even more acutely felt.*

*"Family Rights Group's Lifelong Links approach aims to change that, strengthening the family and community networks of those children who cannot live at home. It also leads to system change so that relationships are valued and protected from the outset and not unnecessarily broken.*

*"The Department for Education's Children's Social Care Recovery Fund in England and Promise Partnership funding from the Scottish Government are important opportunities to improve how the child welfare system operates. We're excited to be working with new local authorities to expand Lifelong Links so that hundreds more children and young people in care can benefit."*

## **Sandy and Bradley, young people who have taken part in Lifelong Links, share their thoughts:**

*Sandy: "I think the biggest surprise for me was probably getting in touch with my auntie. She'll have some of the answers as to the questions I had about my mum. I just, I wanted to see my brothers, wanted to know what they look like, wanted to have a relationship with them and I actually have that now. Things just feel a bit more normal. I feel a lot more connected because I have family now."*

*Bradley: "I'd had no contact with them at all (father's family).. at my Lifelong Links family group conference my grandfather stood up and welcomed me into the family and gave me a hug.... I can (now) just go to my aunties, uncles, granddad, go have a catch up, have a cup of tea, help granddad up the allotment. They are always there and they know I'm there for them too."*



**Our free telephone advice  
line is open**

**Monday to Friday**

**9.30am to 3pm**

**(excluding Bank Holidays)**

**Call us on 0808 801 0366**

**For Textphone dial 18001**

**followed by the advice**

**line number**



## **Join our Councillors' Network**

A partnership for change across the child welfare system, to improve outcomes for children and support for parents and kinship carers



**Family Rights Group**  
Helping Families Helping Children