

The 3rd Annual
European Family Group
Conference Network Event

11th –12th November 2005

Novotel Hotel, Cardiff, Wales



Hosted by the All-Wales Family
Group Meeting Network

European Family Group Conference Network Event Cardiff, Wales 11th –12th November 2005

Minutes

Day 1: 11th November

Introductions

Mike Clark, Chair of the All-Wales Family Group Meeting Network, gave a warm welcome to all the delegates who had travelled to Cardiff from across Europe and beyond to attend this annual network event which Wales had agreed at last year's meeting in Leuven (Belgium) to host this year.

Mike outlined the planned structure for the 2 days and provided the opportunity for all delegates to introduce themselves by name, country and their role in relation to FGC development in their country.

Mike then set out some of the aims, objectives, hopes and aspirations for the 2 days ahead, stressing the overarching goal of the need to share information and good/poor practice across and between countries.

Open space

Abyd Quinn Aziz (Wales, Cardiff University) gave an overview of the principle of 'open space' forum, which should provide an opportunity for all delegates to determine the subject areas that they wish to discuss with others over the course of the two days ahead. Abyd explained that in 'open space', the agenda is a blank sheet of paper to begin with and it is for delegates to decide for themselves what the contents of the discussions should be. This was an opportunity for those issues which delegates were keen to discuss to provide the framework of the agenda.

Abyd then set out some of the key principles of the open space approach and the key role delegates would play in creating the evolving and flexible agenda – **ultimately, to be able to talk and discuss with others about what they want to talk about!**

Country Presentations

Abyd outlined the first session 'Country Presentations' – each of the delegates were asked to provide a brief overview of developments within their country to date in respect of the development of FGC. What do countries want to celebrate, what are the main challenges, what has worked well or not so well and what are they most proud of!

Delegates were divided into country groups and were given 30 minutes to prepare their presentation. Countries were asked to write down the key issues to share with the whole group and to nominate a spokesperson to communicate the key points.

The following are just some of the key points that were shared at the event and should not be seen as a comprehensive account of all the developments to date that have taken place within any given country. The information below is set out in order of presentation.



Wales

Overview: An overview of Wales as a country, its language, heritage and culture set the scene for this presentation. Wales has its own network, the All Wales Family Group Meeting Network, and of the 22 local regions that make up the country, 17 have FGC projects. This network, and a regional South Wales network meet at least four times a year to share information and practice around FGC development and is generally well supported. Geographically, some projects and workers are quite isolated and small in numbers and this support helps enormously.

Challenges: we still have to sell the FGC model!

Research: Cardiff University is developing a tool kit resource (collecting data from 300 families across Wales – due to be written up in 2006) and also local evaluations within regions have taken place, which have generally been very positive.

Funding: inconsistent and sporadic across Wales. In general, the referral criteria is determined by the source of funding, which inevitably limits FGC availability to families. Sustainable and long-term funding remains a big challenge across Wales.

Issues: After 15 years of trying to change systems we need to further empower families and children to take FGC development forward. The involvement of family members as a group in the regional project of Cardiff has resulted in families wanting to take the agenda forward and campaign to promote FGC – how can we aid this and help ensure they have ownership of this process? How can we also widen out the use of FGC into other areas and for other marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Proud: We are proud of both networks, which work well, somewhere safe and comfortable in which to exchange information and practice.

Use: FGC are mainly used with children and families but this is recognised as being too narrow – what about adults, mental health, disability etc – need to look at developing FGC in these areas.



Sweden

Overview: FGC established since 1995, received national funding for delivery of FGC in 2 projects until 1999. Today we have FGC all over the country. A national network meet annually but no national funding, so travelling costs are a big problem. We have regional networks in each principality.

Funding: 10 municipalities now without any national funding.

Research: We have a Nordic collaboration mostly focused on research and there is a bi-annual conference with other Nordic countries. Small evaluations have taken place locally with state money going to research not to projects. Three major studies have been undertaken. The first two proved positive then the third, a follow up study (Sundell, K.) looking at outcomes for children 3 years after the FGCs, had a negative impact in Sweden. Now there is no national interest from the state or from academics who have been very negative. These people are very influential and people listen, though they are ill-informed.

Use: FGCs have been used in many areas aside from children – housing, adults, elderly. FGC community based conference (called parental group conferencing) – evaluation coming out soon which is very exciting

Proud: we are still here! Despite no state funding or support (now). We are proud we are still doing and developing FGC nationally in spite of lack national and political support or funding. Most social work and FGCs is done in municipalities (locally)

Issues: we need political and national support – how do we reach them? Perhaps rename FGC - different names and its perception have weakened the model. How can we adapt the model for use with other groups other than children and youths?



USA

Overview: In the USA, the American Humane Association (AHA) lead on the development of the FGC approach. The AHA is a well-recognised organisation in the USA, supporting FGC. AHA do promotion not practice of FGC and we contract out our expertise e.g. the state of Columbia wanted to embed FGC there so the AHA did training etc for them. AHA deliver training, consultation with administrators, annual conference on FGC decision-making, website, forum discussion, email updates, publications, videos to promote FGC. AHA also do policy, campaigning etc – hard to reach legislators.

Challenges: 35 out of 50 states have some FGC practice reaching over 200 communities. 6 states have really embraced FGC practice

Funded: state funds or community/foundation funds, sponsorships and grants.

Use: focus is mainly child welfare, though substance abuse, juvenile justice, domestic violence etc also delivered. The FGC New Zealand model is widely adopted.

Networks: national mailing list, 600 people at recent conference. Some local networks AHA link in with. Strong FGC states have strong networks we link with. Then there are general child welfare federal networks we also make links with.

Research: substance abuse & child welfare project (research). Not a lot of funding for research. FGC in domestic violence and sexual abuse research has also been done.

Issues: every state has done an assessment in child welfare – outcomes that families are disconnected, not involved etc – this provided an opportunity for FGC promotion. We have a proliferation of FGC models, which have weakened the practice – some with less clear standards and differences in quality. Some poor practice models are well funded and we are trying to harmonise without losing the New Zealand model approach. We need standards for FGC – key principles that help families, we need to build these principles and rescue the New Zealand principles. We need to link more globally.

Proud: work of AHA, number of states have embraced the FGC approach fully. Collaboration with this European network. Some states are also involving families well.



Northern Ireland (NI)



Scotland (S)



England (E) (joint presentation)

Overview: a broad overview of the development of FGC in the UK was shared and the relationships that exist between the 3 countries and also its neighbours, Wales and Eire.

Funding: broad - state/government, education, social services etc. - all dependent on the development of work. Some short-term work receives funding and some projects never get beyond the pilot stage. There is some european funding as well.

Use: child welfare, prior to child protection situation, education, domestic violence. Also adult services (NI) and FGCs in mental health issues and work

have been undertaken with prisons (S). Also wide use of the restorative justice FGC model.

Network: (NI): 9-year-old network (child welfare and restorative justice combined).

(S): national network, open to non-FGC workers with regular newsletter, and have international consultants feeding into this network, which is still developing.

(E): Family Rights Group host the main national network-unclear what's happening nationally, but some strong local networks across England locally.

Research: (S): 1st major research, audit from 1998 – 2005 just released in August 2005 (700 FGC meetings) – very positive evaluation – we are now looking to long-term research. Research beginning into Children Hearing System – comparison between this and FGC. Also 2 research projects beginning into male involvement in FGC and using FGC in permanency planning.

(E): local research looking at outcomes (unintended outcomes) in the region of Kent – also an evaluation of FGC with the elderly.

(NI): funding issue, poor on evaluation at the present time

Issues: we are all still trying to sell the model while delivering it at the same time! We need to get children and families to own the process. Practitioners still have a child rescue attitude.

Proud: (E): Kent region have a solid service – 4 to 30 staff, (S): promoting national standards. (NI): new DVD to sell!



Russia

Overview: Very small FGC practice to date, still developing the process

Funding: no national funding yet for FGC as its still very new, although discussions are taking place and funding to date has come from a number of sources linked to Norway.

Use: Abandoned children are a large target group within Russian institutions (100, 000 across Russia which is increasing). The aim would be to look to keep families from abandoning their children.

Network: within 1 region of North-West Russia, and partners in 9 regions doing restorative justice

Research: we would like to do that! Something hopefully for the future

Issues: The State takes 100% responsibility for families; thus, FGC approach is a real challenge. Russian authorities do not believe in the family structure – they take charge – we need to change this. Institutions are used always but

we want to look at FGC approach to keep families together. The Challenge is within training i.e. trying to change the mindset of coordinators that they do not have to have the answers. (Change of culture is needed).

Proud: Russia has approved our programme (which will be greater than FGC alone). We have good sponsors who understand we need time to make the changes. We can spend the time we need in order to have the best possible results – Quality before Quantity!



Norway

Overview: National research project Dec 2002 – 2005. However, last year we only had 35 cases. We have been asked to continue for another year because we need more time to follow up work with the report due June 2006. The focus in Norway has been on implementation and research working side by side. The report will decide the state's action, who have to date been very positive over the past 6 months. Status: 40 municipalities to begin, now 75-100 research cases now, following up 6 months later and a comparison group. There are 5 persons doing the implementation part of programme (full and part time) situated in different parts of the country. Researchers are placed across countries. One area delivered 25 FGC in one year. .

Use: Child welfare but also developing FGC in new areas e.g. domestic violence (10-15 cases next year), restorative justice, homelessness, elderly etc. – all planned for next year.

Network: connected well as a team and talking to Sweden, UK, Netherlands and Denmark – good inspiration.

Proud: strong team ethic and enthusiasm – and an extension for one year!

Issues: still very early stage. Quality control is a main issue in accordance with the model. Bring ideology and value into the education of social workers (we are teaching the values and theories in the SW degrees to change the mind set at an early stage). We have a joint Masters in the Nordic countries – FGC is a main part of this. Education is very important to embrace the ideology. Implementation of FGC remains an issue

Next year: Next 4th Nordic FGC conference May 2006 (flyers handout) – focus on child in FGC and the child experience than in traditional child protection working. Abstracts welcome, some workshops in English will be arranged.



Germany

Overview: FGC project in the region of Stuttgart – a short-term project with little funding attached. The focus is in child protection and youth justice. Have made connections with New Zealand to help provide training.

Network: Hoping to network across Europe to learn and prevent mistakes happening here

Proud: Have found a number of good resources which should help us in our development

Issues: We need tips for the implementation of FGC, building on the New Zealand model. We need information on how to do the implementation. We need to share information and experiences



Netherlands

Overview: Started in 2001 – FGC in child welfare and restorative justice. Eigen-Kracht is the umbrella organisation, which assists in the implementation. FGCs currently in 5 regions across Holland.

Funding: Private, state and municipal funding.

Use: School, domestic violence, employment, child welfare and child protection is now the biggest part - disabilities, community FGCs also.

Research: A great deal of research has been done, an annual report and long term research on safety and autonomy 2 years after an FGC has been undertaken.

Issues: ownership of the FGC by families themselves: how can we ensure this?
Clarity in the role of the professionals? (Is training the way?) School training programmes are being developed. Our mandate: how can families have an FGC? Develop a pressure group to support families, politicians etc

Proud: today, national meeting in Holland and we are nominated for nation child welfare award. (Will hear by 3pm)



Bulgaria

Overview: In 2004, a presentation to Child Protection workers was undertaken and in 2005 training was provided – this is what's been done. 3 projects are at the 'ideas' stage. 1 programme has been approved which will look at school exclusions, due to start in 2006 in the capital Sophia. Background to this: In 2002, 2000 children have dropped out of education, now in 2005, the figure is 20,000 – huge issue for Bulgaria. The 2nd

programme is awaiting approval, which will look at preventing children becoming looked after in residential care, again in Sophia. The 3rd programme – in 2 cities, with funding from World Bank will look at child welfare. We are currently campaigning, writing information on FGC for professionals.

Networking: 2 NGOs working in the field.

Research: important to us, it will be preliminary research. No clients know about FGC yet. This is an issue for us.

Issue: problem with a name, social workers getting mixed up – need to take it slowly.

Proud: people are keen, can see the benefits and all the information has been done.



Denmark

Overview: Working with FGC since 2000. Awareness of FGC is well developed across Denmark – we started with 8 municipalities, now up to 80 municipalities. This masks what's happening however – 1 big project, a triangle project between 3 partners to educate about FGCs around Denmark. Opinion is that FGC is implemented everywhere but still a long way till social workers will suggest a family for FGC. Families have to wait for social workers to engage in FGC. Social workers hold all the power. We've introduced the ideology and principles but this still isn't enough. Still not common practice nationwide, but well developed in some municipalities.

Funding: Funding arrives via the state - we have all the money we need, maybe that's a problem! There is a great deal of state support.

Proud: We have made a film in Danish – real FGC family, no actors and has been on Danish network television (documentary). Yet, no families have been running forward requesting an FGC yet after this film! FGC with homeless people – very successful model for them to get in touch with their family network. Have had 25 of these FGC with huge success (about reuniting families and friends, getting education and work). This has transformed the model to other groups who are not doing so well in society

We also did training and provided material, working over one year - this has led to social work teachers training students in Denmark about FGC

Issues: How are FGC being used politically? Are FGC being used as a way of saving money? New law which suggests FGC is combined with a way of saving money, so our ideology and principles may not be adopted as it spreads across the country. Are we supporting the holistic way of working with families – still seen as casework not community work. Empowerment is

focused on the individual not enough on society and the community. Can we do something to marry the two?

New legislation focused on how we are including children and families. Research showed that we didn't – new legislation stressed involvement and listening more strongly. Is FGC helpful to improve democracy and inclusion?

Research: Danish research – interviewing children and observations of the meetings (Nordic research project) – outcomes for children is the focus (report due by end of 2006) – Finland leads the project (includes Iceland and other Nordic countries. Looking at the influence of children, how do they participate (age 7-18). We interview children before and after FGC to follow the process. What is the influence of children in the FGC?

WORKSHOPS

Workshop 1

Title: The Use of FGC's With Adults

Flintshire:

- Care leavers (up to 25 years of age & Person Centred Planning)
- Transition – Children's services –Disability & Mental Health

Northern Ireland:

Presented to Adult Mental Health Working Group – leading to a pilot project next year.

- Linked to reduce the possibility of yo-yoing between home and hospital.
- Preparation for discharge.

Netherlands:

Project for Adults with Learning Difficulties

- Arranging work
- Where to live
- Planning
- Pre – release from custody

Kidney dialysis – new project support

Denmark:

- Looking at homelessness
- Starting at Mental Health Hospital

Having network meetings (not family as some people don't have families).

Sweden:

Each municipality will aim to offer FGC's in all areas of Social Care / Mental Health using:

- Professional knowledge / resources
- Private family time

Also has a project for the elderly in Malmo for one year.

England:

Adult services have approached the FGC Project! Have just launched projects for:

- Older people at risk of residential placements
- Learning difficulties

ACTION:

- Projects have to cheat to get an FGC (Wales, Netherlands)
- If we show that FGC's work in the wider area – we will support promote FGC's
- Plans can be agreed with an “acceptable level of risk”. These are adults remember!
- All elements of FGC are included i.e. Private Family Time
Agreement of plan
Advocacy etc
- Think of training needs of the co-ordinators

Title: Pressure Group – Families urge to mandate

- Access for families to FGC
- To know about their possibilities / rights to decide
- Families inform families (room on website)
- Its a way of being rather than doing
- Get families engaged through email groups, parents groups and parents teacher groups, indirect
- Invitations to politicians / local representatives to a regular meeting of independent co-ordinators
- Not a pressure group but an impressive group
- Include your own point of view: I am a family member
- Families on board from the beginning, in the development / direction of project group (FGC's)

Title: How do you teach Social Workers about FGC?

- You cannot do a little bit of FGC
- On what basis do the students choose the profession?
- Can you give help and empowerment?
- Autonomy versus neglect

ACTION

- Don't teach from only one book
- More teachers in Social Work

- The democracy question must be solved:
By discussing social work in industrialised western country compared to new country way of building Social Service

Title: Referrers and their role during FGC, before and after.

- Role of referrer – concerns or issues about young persons responsibility to agree plan.
- What happens if there is no FGC, (another question to be asked)
- Sweden / Norway - Traingle meeting – preliminary meeting with referrer and those with parental responsibility, to ensure understanding of the issues.
- Scotland – shifting the balance of power, preparation of professionals as they do feel very defensive. Don't have a preliminary meeting with professionals. Co-ordinators meet with family members to ensure the family understand the issues.
- Wales – Reservations about preliminary meetings. FGC's are more family led.

ACTION

- Give further consideration to referral meetings for the referrer and family together to discuss agenda for the meeting.

Title: Phase one of FGC: Who to invite and who decides?

ACTION

- Think about choice of professionals to attend FGC
State Responsibility
Versus
Family Autonomy
- Think about different types of co-ordinators
- We need to talk and think about this in a lot more detail.

WORKSHOP 2

Title: Planning European Conference 2006

ACTION

- Denmark to host in Copenhagen jointly with Norway on 13th & 14th October 2006 with a pre-conference dinner on evening of 12th October
- Website – global
- Make links with EU – Discuss at next conference
- Think about how we organise European Network – Discuss at next conference.

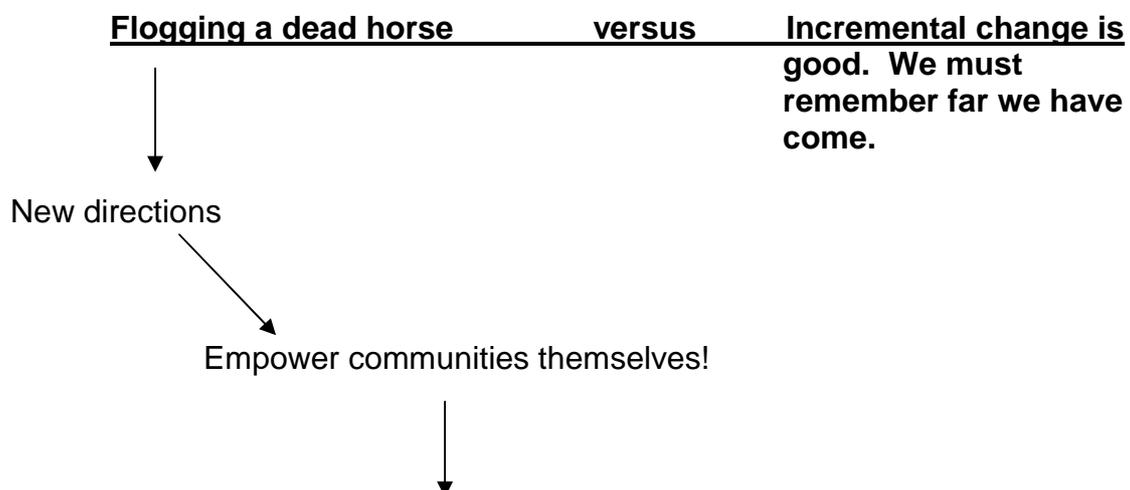
Title: “It is not a matter of how we should enable children and families to take control here but when (and as quickly as possible) as the professional / consumerist system might start taking control!”

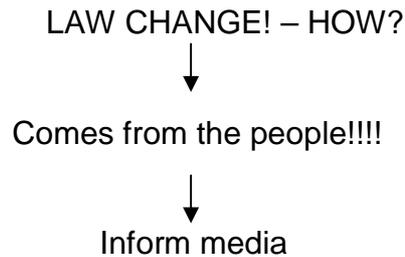
What to do?

Trying to engage communities.

- Community advert
- Using the media publicity – newspapers, TV, Radio
- Through law – Mike Doolan
 - Power
 - Lobbying , handcuff to railings
- Children / young people to tell others
- Service users telling each other
- Coronation Street / Eastenders 5/6 soaps and as many in Wales.
- Making the links with other groups / interest groups, who are part of a wider Social Justice Issue / Agenda

Big Discussion





ACTION:

- Mair – Be part of a group working towards a meeting for family users, national or international!
- David – become Director of Social Services Department
- Keith – keep chipping away
- Involve Children / young people and families!

WORKSHOP 3

Title: Use of advocates for children and Young people in FGC's

ACTION

- Discuss the use of both professional and family member advocates in our projects.
- Link above to research.
- Share research across Europe.

Title: Self-Employed or In House Co-ordinators?

ACTION

- Background doesn't matter their role and values are far more important. (Some disagreement in this group).

Title: Creating a new FGC organisation

- Enthusiasm from individuals but we need to change the system, very difficult to do, nobody wants to give away their power, working within the system will never work.
- Start outside the system.
- Clear distinction needed between what professionals want for families and what families want for themselves.
- Holland – geared up for safety. Local systems provide money but his does not change the system.

- Be patient it is impacting slowly on the way social workers speak and work with families.
- Citizens have the right to first have their say.
- Scotland – objectives; no life decision to be made about a child / young person, before there is an FGC. Nowhere near this objective as yet, making an impact on all levels to do this.
- Denmark – new legislation, before a child / young person goes into foster care, social worker must explore all family networks for example, FGC moving forward very fast.
- England – in –house projects will always use a FGC before putting a child / young person into foster care in some counties in England. Independent projects can't make that in – road into the system.
- The voice of the child is very seriously considered now within mainstream thinking.

ACTION

- Need to start this process and continue the discussion American Humane Association may do a paper and our networks will look at this.

Title: Eastern European Network

ACTION

- Need to establish a contact list and network to provide continued support amongst countries with similar experiences.

WORKSHOP 4

Title: Co-ordinators role

ACTION

- Exchange training programmes and ideas about coaching and supervision.

Title: The future and opportunities of the network internationally.

- WEBSITE – decide on structure. (staff contact webmaster – American Humane Association).
English is the most common language but we may need additional languages.
- FUNDING – Position Paper
To seek funding opportunities and to promote to new countries.
Value of universal application
Work in local partnerships

Find resemblance with local values

- IMPLEMENTATION / RESEARCH / STANDARDS / RIGHTS – BASED.
Embed in ongoing activities
Hold update meetings with scheduled conferences
- GOAL – strengthen network
Take network to the next level
Expand
Form a small steering group
Meaningful critical communications

ACTION

- Rename network to FGC International Partnership
- Website links (3 months)
- Steering Committee (6 months)
- Position Paper (9 months)
- Next Meeting (1 year)

Title: Information giving at stage 1 of FGC process

- Common worry / Goal
- Questions to go with goal
- Info shared with family BEFORE meeting
- Non judgemental
Social Workers view only
One view of many
- Both strengths and risk / worry give hope to change!
- Go together with existing systems of investigating commuter systems

Title: Project Development in Russia

- This was a discussion between those from Eastern European countries regarding their shared experiences.

ACTION

- Talked about plans for future developments and direction in Russia.

Plenary Session

Next meeting

The next annual European Family Group Conference Network event will take place in Copenhagen, Denmark between 13th-14th October. The event will begin with a reception on the evening of the 12th. This event will be jointly organised by Denmark and Norway.

Discussion Board

As a short-term solution (see below) to allow countries to communicate and share information between annual events, Abyd suggested setting up an international discussion board – this was agreed. Abyd will send an email to all delegates present asking them if they wish to ‘sign up’ to this process.

International FGC Website

As a long-term initiative to facilitate networking across the globe, a global website would need to be developed. The USA delegate, Sonia Velazquez, suggested that the **American Humane Association** could offer to host a global website – this was agreed. To assist in the co-ordination of this process, assistance was offered by the **Family Rights Group** (England). Information would be sent to FRG in the first instance. Following this, a steering group would be created and then a position paper (which the AHA would lead on). The long-term goal would be for a multi-language website to be created and for discussion papers in different languages made available. This was all agreed.

Closing Comments

Abyd closed the session by asking each delegate to answer the following two questions and share their answers with the group.

Question 1: What have you got from the 2 days?

Question 2: What are you going to take away with you?

The following are the responses shared by delegates

What have you got from the 2 days?

- Got a sense of belonging, all of us working together
- Good to network and meet others
- Strong commitment from others
- Got to know people by face
- Got so much from the 2 days, so much to consider, really is a big thing
- Got the answers to my questions
- Interesting to hear different discussions and similarities across countries

- Lots of new ideas to take home
- Seeing everyone committed to FGC
- Feel strengthened on the rights of families to plan and support
- More enthusiastic now than when I arrived
- So much enthusiasm in the room here, we have come a step further today!
- Happy to hear of moving forward the concept of FGC to other areas of social work
- Interesting to talk of different angles, cultural perspectives – very interesting
- This conference was very relaxed here compared to others I've attended
- To make contact with others – this was very useful
- Lots of information and answers to questions I arrived with.
- Very grateful for input and information. Look forward to next year
- Nice to see a stable number of people coming back each year and good to see newcomers with new ideas – happy with that plus see the same faces
- Happy to see people sharing ideas and information, new approaches and seeing new challenges
- Came feeling exhausted about FGC development but leaving with clarity of the value of FGC and with more energy
- Great to speak to others
- Enjoyed being with converts and not having to convince people
- Got a lot of energy from these meetings
- Energy from the discussion and meeting others with similar ideas
- Happy to meet converts, it's been an inspiration exploring how FGC is used in different context
- Thoroughly enjoyed it, very inspirational, amazing commitment and unselfish sharing of contrast. Haven't had such a good day in a long while!
- Nice to catch up, meet new people and see commitment – sense of nourishment from taking part
- Renewed enthusiasm, sharing ideas boosted me, sometimes we struggle!
- Renewed belief in the FGC process and the empowerment process

What are you going to take away with you?

- To try different ways and different approaches
- Expand my service and promote my service more widely
- Take away the community feel of FGC, I feel part of it now. Still need more discussions of the rights of family versus the rights of young people. Taking the development forward and planning for the future.
- To contact Eastern Europe organisations and network more widely
- Do more studying around role of coordinators
- How can we get FGC implemented? – to focus on it more
- Plan to involve family members in the network
- Will ask families themselves what they can do

- To communicate in my country further and proved that the FGC model is the right one
- Families who inform families – need to develop this further. Also look at the role of coordinators more
- Need to spread the model of FGC further. Need to make political moves at EU level
- To continue to network across Europe further
- Lots of faces I have met and will contact people who I have met here
- Getting in touch and promote more in my country – I will try my best!
- Would like to see what works well where and to take that home
- All my questions have been answered!
- I'm excited about developing adult FGC work and have made contacts here
- Will make more concrete links and look forward to the website being developed
- To develop FGC with adults – look forward to keeping in contact with others
- Keep in contact and to learn more
- Enthusiasm and less anxiety about developing FGC in mental health – my batteries are recharged
- Try to connect with the regional forum in the future and look how to get funding to develop the next event next year – leaving with a smile!
- Take away all the notes and read more
- Need to take away the barriers to empowerment – this is what we need to focus on

Abyd, Mike, Sean and Helen from the Wales team closed the event and wished everyone a safe journey home and are looking forward to Copenhagen in 2006!