

The Children's Justice Initiative and Family Group Decision Making in Brown County

“The Ties That Bind”

**Judge John Rodenberg
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Introduction

Judge John Rodenberg

FGDM in Minnesota and Brown County

- Family Group Decision Making (not a new Idea!)
- FGDM in Minnesota since 1996
- Convergence of two ideas in Brown County
- Frequent CJI meetings
- FGDM had been funded by The Three Counties for Kids Mental Health collaborative from 2002-2004 in Brown, Sibley and Watonwan Counties (1 FTE Facilitator)

- DHS grant received for 2005-2006. Nicollet and Cottonwood Counties added to FGDM collaborative effort (2 FTE Facilitators)
- 2007 DHS grant funded. Blue Earth County added to the FGDM collaborative effort
- Six county FGDM collaborative effort requires funding with local county dollars to support two full time FGDM facilitators and individual conference costs

Purpose of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

- To establish a way for families, joining with relatives and friends, to develop a plan that ensures children get what they need to be safe, stable, and healthy.
- FGDM should not be regarded as “the answer”. replacing existing programs, but as a tool
- It is a process based on “best practice principles” that increases opportunities for shared decision making.

The background of the slide is a warm, orange-brown color with a pattern of stylized, overlapping autumn leaves. The leaves are rendered in various shades of brown and orange, creating a textured, layered effect.

What is Family Group Decision Making?

JoEllen Krenzel, LICSW

- A meeting that incorporates elements of the immediate family, support people, community members, Guardian Ad Litem personnel and service providers.
- Strengths Based Approach
- Family members, support persons, facilitator
- Preparation and relative search
- Reasonable efforts

Just Another Program?

Using the FGDM process to empower families to make decisions about the safety and welfare of their children.

FGDM Values and Principles

- All families have strengths and the ability to expand on their own strengths.
- Families need to utilize their “own” resources to become less “system” dependent.
- Families can generally make well-informed decisions about keeping their children safe and out of the child protection system.
- Group decisions are generally more effective than individual decisions.

Why does FGDM focus on Families?

- Families have the most knowledge to make informed decisions about themselves and their situations
- Families feel safer and take ownership of the plans they make
- Families have the strength to effectively identify and resolve problems to effectuate change through concerted family actions

FGDM Process: Four Main Phases

- Referral to hold the conference
- Preparation and planning for an FGDM conference
- Conference
- Post-conference events

Stages of the FGDM Conference

- Stage 1: Introduction
- Stage 2: Information Sharing
- Stage 3: Private Family Deliberation
- Stage 4: Plan Presentation

After the Conference

- The worker will submit the plan to the Court for approval.
- The family and the worker together monitor the plan.
- The family member contacts the worker if the plan is not being followed.
- The group may choose to have a follow up conference to make any necessary changes to the family plan.
- The facilitator prepares a written conference summary which includes the “Family Plan.”

Family Services Agency Philosophy

Mike Travers, LICSW

Child/Family Services Supervisor

- Who is best suited to raise children? Agency or family?
- Reduce the number of children in long term foster care
- Strength based approach
- Less conflict between agency and family
- “Through the Eyes of the Child”
- FGDM used throughout the life of the case
- FGDM best facilitated by non-county entity

What Types of Cases Are Appropriate for Family Group Decision Making?

- Child safety is first and foremost
- Is there a decision that needs to be made regarding the child's safety, stability, health, and/or well-being?
- Is the family open to using the process to create a plan and have they agreed with the referring worker on the purpose of a family group decision making conference in their particular situation?

How can FGDM help the referring social worker or probation agent?

- Less adversarial process that is a better foundation for decision making
- Keeps the focus on the needs of the children rather than on conflict with the agency
- Shares decision making with families and the community, stresses accountability
- Provides access to informal community resources and supports
- Reduces court time and costs

Brown County Data

- Data prepared by Minnesota Department of Human Services, Capacity Development Unit
- Thank you Christeen Borsheim, DHS

Reason for Discharge by Episode	2005 <u>Brown</u> State	2004 <u>Brown</u> State	2003 <u>Brown</u> State	2002 <u>Brown</u> State	2001 <u>Brown</u> State	2000 <u>Brown</u> State
Reunification with Parents/primary Caregiver	<u>75.4%</u> 70.0%	<u>75.8%</u> 70.0%	<u>74.2%</u> 70.45	<u>91.7%</u> 74.3%	<u>74.4%</u> 74.7%	<u>72.0%</u> 76.2%
Living with other relatives	<u>1.8%</u> 3.4%	<u>6.1%</u> 4.4%	<u>9.7%</u> 4.1%	<u>1.2%</u> 4.8%	<u>18.6%</u> 6.9%	<u>6.0%</u> 6.9%
Adoption Finalized	<u>14.0%</u> 8.2%	<u>0.0%</u> 6.4%	<u>1.6%</u> 7.3%	<u>1.2%</u> 5.2%	<u>2.3%</u> 4.5%	<u>0.0%</u> 4.7%

Calendar Year	TPR's
2000	2
2001	0
2002	0
2003	1
2004	7
2005	3

Calendar Year	Brown County Adoptions	TPR to Adoption (days) Brown County	Statewide Adoptions	TPR to adoption (Days) Statewide
2000	0	0	632	718
2001	1	678	542	655
2002	2	656	618	630
2003	1	228	714	590
2004	0	0	572	627
2005	7	317	732	336

Statistics of FGDM in Minnesota

- Statistics from a Minnesota evaluation study:
 - Data collected in October 2001 to June 2002
 - 919 surveys from 113 FGDM meetings
 - 93%-felt prepared for the conference
 - 97.6%-felt safe during the conference
 - 96.6%-participation was voluntary
 - 95.8%-satisfied with the Family Plan
 - 98.8%-facilitator remained neutral during conference
 - 96.6%- would recommend this conference process
 - 97.9%-felt amount of family time was adequate
 - 98.1%-felt amount of conference meeting time was adequate
 - 93.1%-felt this conference improved communication between social worker and parent

Statistics of FGDM in Brown County

From October 2004- October 2005

- Placement before FGDM
 - 3 out of 14 with a relative
 - 4 out of 14 with a parent
 - 6 out of 14 in foster care
 - 1 out of 14 in residential

Statistics of FGDM in Brown County

From October 2004-October 2005

- After FGDM
 - Those with relatives before FGDM:
 - 2 out of 3 were adopted by the relative
 - 1 out of 3 was kept with relatives.
 - Those with a parent before FGDM:
 - continued to stay with the same parent.
 - Those in foster care before FGDM:
 - 2 out of 6 went to a parent
 - 2 out of 6 went to a relative
 - 1 out of 6 was adopted by foster care
 - 1 out of 6 went into residential

THE TIES THAT BIND

Judge John Rodenberg

Mike Travers

- Required Findings
- “Best Interests”
- “Reasonable/Active Efforts”
- “Relative Search”

Benefits of FGDM in the court process

- Case plans are more child focused
- Fewer contested CHIPS and TPR's
- Court findings are bulletproofed
- Permanency Timelines

Implementation In Brown County

- All CJI team members must “buy into” the the CJI values and principles (e.g., front end loading)
- Judicial leadership was significant to success
- Judge, Public Defender, County Attorney, Social Service Agency, and Guardian Ad Litem had to agree to trust the process
- CJI was our vehicle to reach agreement

Questions?

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