

IV. FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING/ RESTORATIVE CONFERENCING

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Restorative Resources is a non-profit organization that provides restorative justice practices and resources to individuals, families, and communities in Sonoma County. Restorative justice is a community-based approach to dealing with crime that helps youth who offend take responsibility for their actions, repair harm caused to victims and the community, and address the underlying issues that led to the crime. Restorative Resources' approach is based on restorative justice practices established in a number of different countries and areas in the United States.¹¹

Restorative Resources oversees the work of five other organizations that work in different areas of Sonoma County. Restorative Resources and its partners offer Family Group Conferencing/Restorative Conferencing¹², a structured approach that involves youth, their families and support networks, victims, law enforcement, and other community members in resolving conflicts that arise as a result of youth-perpetrated crime. In the words of the program, the focus of the Family Group Conference/Restorative Conference (FGC) is on "putting things right, not punishment."¹³

FGC is primarily a diversion program in Sonoma County and targets youth who are at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system and those who are referred to the Probation Department but are not on probation. Youth with filed or sustained petitions are not eligible to participate. Youth who have committed misdemeanors are eligible to participate but those who have committed more serious offenses are not currently eligible (although some youth who have committed *non-adjudicated* felonies do participate). Youth must admit to the charges against them in order to participate in a Family Group Conference.

The Probation Department, police, sheriff's department, court, schools, or community-based organizations can refer youth to Restorative Resources. Once a youth has been referred, program staff send a notification letter to the youth and family and a notification letter to the victim(s). Program staff then set up meetings with the youth and family to discuss what happens at a Family Group Conference, develop a list of support for that youth, and discuss their level of participation and rights in the process. Program staff also meet with the victim(s) to determine what level of participation they want to have in the process. Additionally, program staff meet with law enforcement in preparation for the conference.

After all interested parties have been contacted and initial meetings have been held, program staff invite everyone to a Family Group Conference. Family Group Conferences are an

State Outcome Measures
Reduce Arrests and Recidivism
Reduce Incarceration
Reduce Probation Violations *
Probation Completion*
Increase Completion of Restitution*
Local Outcome Measures
Reduce Sustained Petitions**
Successful Completion of Program
Improvement in Risk/Protective Factors

* Because this measure will not usually apply to this program's target population, no significant difference from baseline is expected.
 ** While reduction in sustained petitions is a local outcome measure, findings are presented alongside state-required outcomes pertaining to involvement with the juvenile justice system.

¹¹ Source: www.restorativeresources.org

¹² Family Group conferencing changed its name to Restorative Conferencing in 2005 but for purposes of this report, the program will still be referred to as FGC.

¹³ Source: Restorative Resources brochure.

opportunity to bring together the young person who has offended, his/her family members and other supporters, and the victim(s) and other community members. Program staff, who are trained in the restorative justice approach, facilitate the Conference; law enforcement officers also participate in the Conference. At the Family Group Conference, everyone has the opportunity to discuss the harm, impact, and underlying reasons that led to the crime and to participate in the development of a plan for the youth who offended. During the conference, the youth presents the plan to the victim, police and community. Every plan is unique and tailored to the youth and the offense that was committed. The purpose of the plan is to repair the damage that has been done, rather than to penalize the youth for the actions he/she has committed.

After the Family Group Conference, program staff monitor youths' progress on completing their plans. In some cases, subsequent Family Group Conferences have been held if the youth is slipping on certain tasks in their plans, their adult support is not following through, or minor adjustments need to be made to the plan with the input from the victims, law enforcement, and youth. Youths' participation in the FGC program generally lasts between three and six months, depending on how long it takes them to complete their restitution plan.

DATA SOURCES

LFA used several data sources to evaluate the FGC program:¹⁴

- JJCPA entry, exit, and follow-up data;
- Interviews with staff of Restorative Resources;
- Surveys of victim participants¹⁵, and;
- Surveys of youth participants.

Please note that throughout the report, the exhibits (tables and charts) display the number and/or percentage of youth with a particular characteristic for both the 2003-2004 project year and the 2004-2005 project year. When there are noteworthy differences in findings between these two project years and the project years prior (2001-2003) they are identified; otherwise findings across all project years are consistent with the current years. Each exhibit specifies the number of respondents (n) based on the number of youth for whom all relevant data were available.

ENTRY DATA

Program Participation

This program evaluation includes data for 187 youth who entered the Family Group Conference program between July 2003 and June 2005. Of these, 141 youth participated in the first program year and 76 participated during the second (there were 30 youth who participated in both years). As described in the following section, the population of youth served by the program has stayed consistent across all project years.

The majority of participating youth were referred to the program by a probation officer or law enforcement officer. The remaining youth were referred by juvenile court or through school, as seen in Exhibit 31.

¹⁴ See Approach (page 3) for more detail.

¹⁵ Surveys of victims were administered and analyzed by staff at Restorative Resources and included in this report for additional context.

**Exhibit 31
Referral Source: FGC**

Source	2003-2004 (n=140)		2004-2005 (n=75)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
PO/Law Enforcement	137	97.9%	72	96.0%
Court	1	0.7%	1	1.3%
School	2	1.4%	2	2.7%

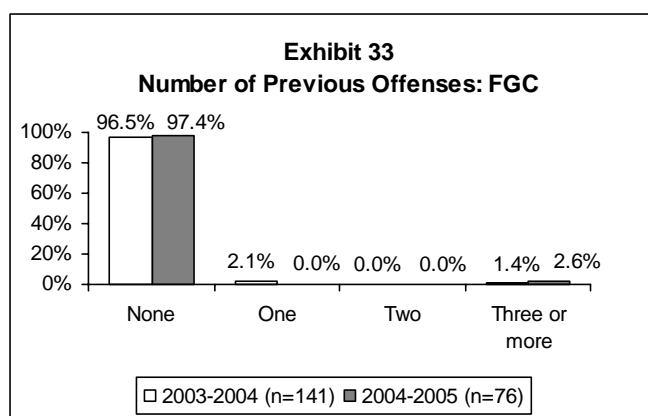
Youth are referred to the program when they have committed an offense. As seen in Exhibit 32, the types of offenses which youth committed range from behavioral issues to more serious crimes such as minor assault and property offense. Most often, youth were referred to the program for vandalism or property offense (39.1% in 2003-2004 and 34.7% in 2004-2005).

**Exhibit 32
Reason for Referral: FGC**

Reason	2003-2004 (n=138)		2004-2005 (n=75)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Vandalism/Property Offense	54	39.1%	26	34.7%
Minor Assault	6	4.3%	2	2.7%
Drug/Alcohol Use	12	8.7%	10	13.3%
Expelled/Suspended	1	0.7%	1	1.3%
Beyond Control of Family	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
Family Issues	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
Burglary	5	3.6%	1	1.3%
Battery	17	12.3%	17	22.7%
Theft	14	10.1%	9	12.0%
Truancy/School Attendance	1	0.7%	1	1.3%

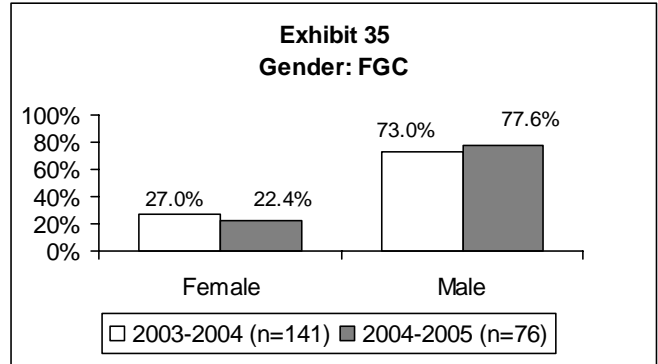
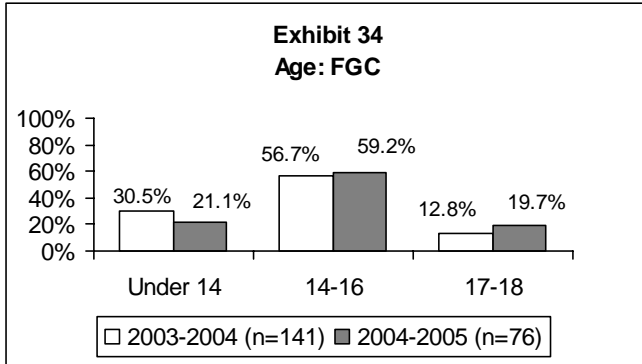
* Totals and percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could check all that apply.

Most youth had not committed a previous offense prior to their most recent offense. Only a small percentage of youth in 2004-2005 (4.7%) had committed one or more previous offenses prior to entry into the program.



Participant Characteristics

Youth who participated in the Family Group Conference program range in age from 10 to 18 years. The average age of participants is 15 years. Youth who participate in the program are most likely male (73.0% in 2003-2004 and 77.6% in 2004-2005).



The majority of all youth that have participated in the program are White (76.0%), although youth from Hispanic, Asian, and other racial and ethnic backgrounds have participated as well.

Exhibit 36
Race: FGC

Race	2003-2004 (n=141)		2004-2005 (n=75)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	99	70.2%	47	62.7%
Hispanic	23	16.3%	21	28.0%
Other Asian	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
Black	5	3.5%	1	1.3%
Multi Racial	5	3.5%	2	2.7%
American Indian	2	1.4%	2	2.7%
Vietnamese	3	2.1%	1	1.3%
Unknown	1	0.7%	1	1.3%
Other	2	1.4%	0	0.0%

For both the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005 project years, nearly all of the youth who participated in the program were enrolled in school, and most were in grades 8-10.

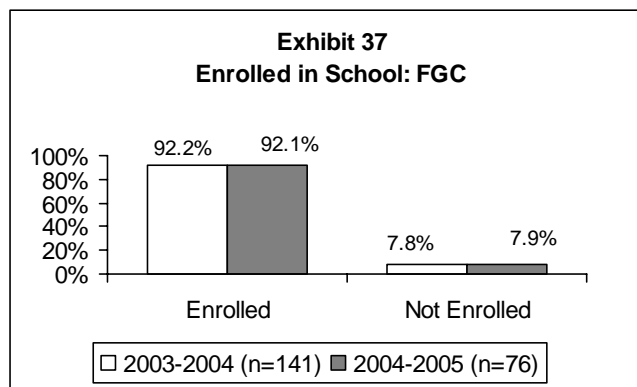


Exhibit 38
Grade Level: FGC

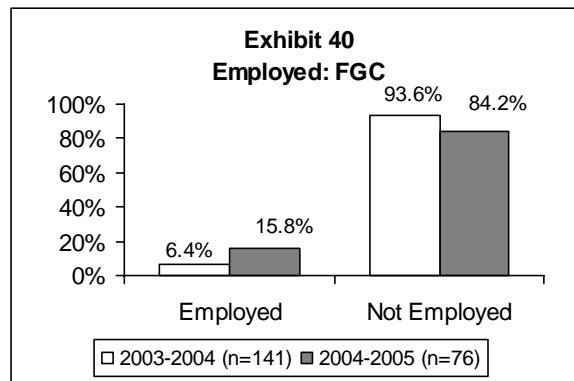
Grade	2003-2004 (n=132)		2004-2005 (n=70)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
7 th grade or lower	30	22.7%	10	14.3%
8 th to 10 th grade	79	59.8%	47	67.1%
11 th to 12 th grade	23	17.4%	13	18.6%

As shown in Exhibit 39, most FGC participants attended public school at time of program entry, although some students attended alternative, community day, court-related, and other types of schools.

Exhibit 39
Type of School Enrolled In: FGC

Type of School	2003-2004 (n=131)		2004-2005 (n=70)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Public School	101	77.1%	52	74.3%
Alternative School	13	9.9%	7	10.0%
Court/Community School	3	2.3%	1	1.4%
Continuation School	4	3.1%	2	2.9%
Private School	2	1.5%	2	2.9%
Charter School	1	0.8%	1	1.4%
Home School	2	1.5%	2	2.9%
Other	5	3.8%	3	4.3%

As shown in Exhibit 40, at the time they were referred to the Family Group Conference program, most of the youth were not employed.

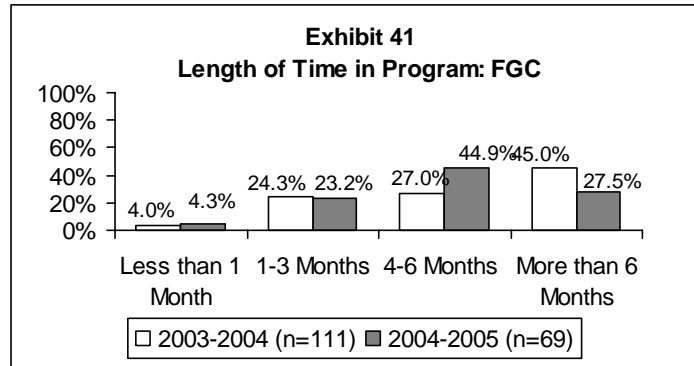


EXIT DATA

Restorative Resources' Family Group Conferencing program is designed as a three to six month program. The length of a youths' participation depends on how long it takes him/her to complete his/her plan. By comparing entry data to exit data that are collected when youth complete the program, it is possible to analyze outcomes related to participation.

Exit data are available for 180 youth who participated in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 project years. A total of 111 youth who entered FGC since July 1, 2003 exited the program prior to June 30, 2004 and 69 youth who entered the program since July 1, 2004 exited the program prior to June 30, 2005; exit data is available for these subsets (100% and 90.8%, respectively) of program participants. The length of time participating in the program ranges from 19 days to over

a year. Those who successfully completed the program participated for an average of 9 days longer than those who did not complete the program.



State-Required Outcomes

The Family Group Conferencing program is designed as an early intervention program for youth who are at-risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. The program is not specifically designed to serve youth who are on probation. In both program years, only two of the youth for whom exit data were available were on informal probation at time of program entry and three youth were put on probation during the program. Most of the youth were never on probation during the program.

One measure of the program's success is if youth do not become involved or further involved with the juvenile justice system after program entry. Only a small percentage of youth (7.8%) had any type of contact with the juvenile justice system between program entry and exit.

Exhibit 42
Involvement with the Juvenile Justice System at Exit: FGC

Outcome Measure	2003-2005	
	Number	Percent
Were Arrested	14	7.8%
With Sustained Petitions	2	1.1%
Were Incarcerated	5	2.8%
Any Contact with Juvenile Justice System*	14	7.8%

*This includes arrests, sustained petitions, and incarcerations.

To assess whether there were significant differences among groups of participants in terms of their rates of recidivism and other types of contact with the juvenile justice system, the evaluators compared youth who entered during the 2003-2004 program year with those who entered during the 2004-2005 program year, male and female participants, and youth of different races.¹⁶ No significant differences were found between any of the different types of participants and their outcomes.

¹⁶ The evaluators also assessed whether youths' level of involvement with the juvenile justice system (based on number of prior contacts) and reasons for referral to a JJCPA program made a significant difference in program outcomes. Findings were inconclusive and, therefore, are not included in this report.

Outcomes related to increasing completion of probation, restitution and community service do not generally apply here since the Family Group Conferencing program is designed to prevent youth from involvement with the juvenile justice system rather than support youth who are involved with the system in completing their probation and other requirements.

Local Outcome Measures

Program Completion

One measure of this program’s effectiveness is the number of youth who successfully complete the process. All JJCPA programs are striving toward the absolute goal of having 60% of their participants successfully complete the program. As seen in Exhibit 43 below, FGC exceeded this goal in both the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 program years. Almost all of the youth who had committed previous offenses prior to program entry completed the program.¹⁷ More detail is provided in Exhibit 44 about why youth did not successfully complete the program.

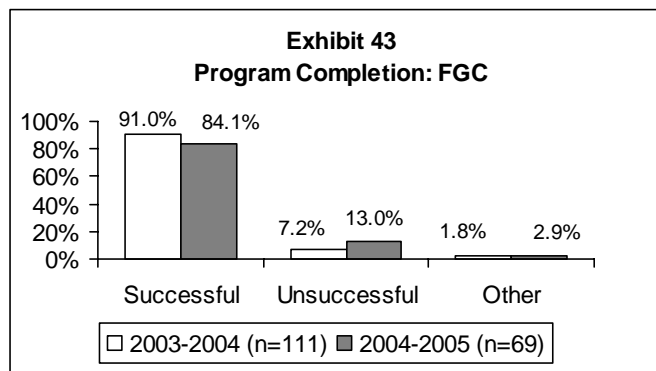


Exhibit 44
Reason for Unsuccessful Program Completion: FGC

Reason	2003-2004 (n=9)		2004-2005 (n=10)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Partial Completion of Program	4	44.4%	3	30.0%
Poor Performance or Behavior in Program	2	22.2%	5	50.0%
Parent/Family moved	0	0.0%	1	10.0%
New Arrest	0	0.0%	1	10.0%
AWOL	2	22.2%	0	0.0%
Other	1	11.1%	0	0.0%

According to the narratives the FGC staff provided, almost all of the youth experienced positive outcomes from their involvement with the program. As with program years past, many youth are noted for having gone “beyond the requirements of their plan.” Exhibit 45 presents select comments as examples of the types of outcomes program staff noted.

¹⁷ One youth, who had four previous offenses, did not successfully complete the program.

Exhibit 45
Select Outcomes Narratives at Program Exit¹⁸

Positive Outcomes

- Minor has been staying on a good track. He did his tasks on time and has been staying closer to home since the incident. He has been doing better at home and has more support in the community now.
- Minor's mother says she sees a different boy now. He's self-motivated and responsible.
- Minor completed most of her plan and is now off to college this August. She is doing well in her life and regrets her mistake.
- Minor's relationship with her dad has improved. They can communicate now. Community service gave her job skills and encouragement to get a job.
- Minor has come a long way. He has shown up on time to his community service for the victim, going to school regularly and joined a group at school to support his studies. He is a cooperative and kind young man.
- Minor learned that it is not worth the consequences to break the law. He has already stayed out of trouble 2 times when his friends didn't because of what he learned.
- Minor had a great attitude and took this program very seriously. She stated that she learned how many people are affected when you break the law and she won't do it again because it's wrong.

Partial or No Positive Outcomes Noted

- Minor did not complete his community service. His mother paid her share of bike cost but father has not paid his. Minor helped clean house for his mother but he continued to be truant after the FGC and was suspended twice.
- Minor refused to comply with the counseling component and the school component. Parents were unable to obtain minor's cooperation and minor, for all practical purposes became beyond their control.
- Minor was unwilling to follow through with the drug treatment part of his plan and so decided to stop working on his plan altogether. He did complete his restitution, take the GED, get a job (which he quit recently), and wrote apology letters.

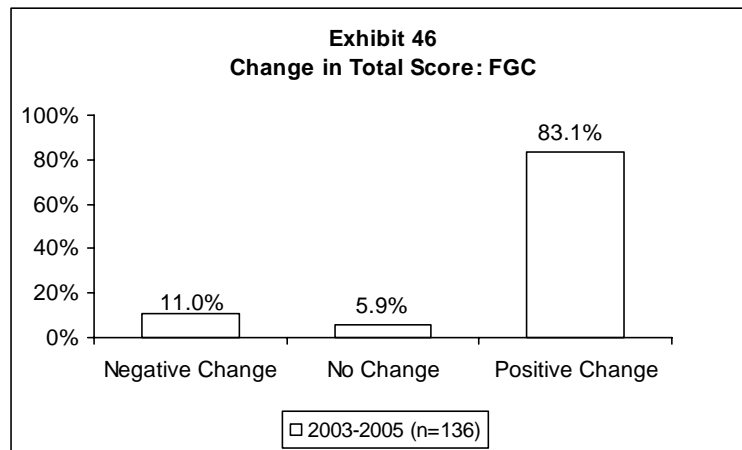
Improvement in Risk and Protective Factors

The primary goal of the Family Group Conferencing program is to assist youth in taking responsibility for and repairing harm caused by their actions. To assess the impact of FGC on youth participants, program staff implemented a Risk and Protective Factors Assessment. The assessment has four dimensions: school, home, community, and personal. Each of these sections has several different indicators. Youths' total score is the sum of their four sub-scores. LFA compared youths' total scores at entry to their total scores at exit to measure change in risk factors.¹⁹

As shown in Exhibit 46, a majority of participants (83.1%) experienced positive change (a decrease in risk factors) from entry to exit. A little over one-tenth (11.0%) experienced negative change (an increase in risk factors), and only 5.9% experienced no change (same number of risk factors at exit as at entry.)

¹⁸ Where a youths' name was recorded, it has been replaced with "Minor." Some statements have been shortened and made more generic, so that they could not be easily associated with one individual.

¹⁹ The assessment tool used in the program year 2004-2005 changed significantly from the tool used in previous program years. The tools are similar in that they measure a total number of risk factors at entry and exit. Evaluators were able to combine scores from each assessment to calculate the change in scores from entry to exit for all participants in both the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 program years.



FOLLOW-UP DATA

Three months after youth complete their plan (and approximately nine months after program entry), Department staff conduct a records check to collect follow-up data for all participants. The purpose of data collected at this time period (referred to by the Department as the “evaluation period”) is to assess outcomes related to the criminal justice system. Data collected at this time period can provide information about whether positive effects of the program are sustained over time and whether youth who complete the program remain outside of the juvenile justice system. Follow-up data were available for 170 of the 187 youth (90.9%) who participated in 2003-2005. At the time of program exit, a total of four youth (8.0%) had some level of contact with the juvenile justice system during the follow-up period. Three youth were arrested (6.0%), two (4.0%) had sustained petitions, one (2.0%) was incarcerated and one (2.0%) had adjudicated violations of probation. None of the current project year participants had any contact with the juvenile justice system during the follow-up therefore they are not included in the exhibit below.

Exhibit 47
Involvement with the Juvenile Justice System at Follow-Up: FGC

Outcome Measure	2003-2005 (n=170)	
	Number	Percent
Were Arrested	15	8.8%
With Sustained Petitions	9	5.3%
Were Incarcerated	10	5.9%
Any Contact with Juvenile Justice System*	17	10.0%

*This includes arrests, sustained petitions, incarcerations.

Evaluators found that no particular groups of youth were more or less likely to become involved with the system.

Comparing Program Participants to Study Group Participants

For this evaluation, Department staff created a study group, so that data for program participants can be compared to data for the study group to assess whether the program appears to have been effective. Evaluators compared outcomes for these 170 program participants (participants from both the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 program years) to outcomes for the 31 study group

members. There are several limitations to the type of statistical analysis that can be completed to compare outcomes for the program participants to the study group.²⁰ However, Exhibit 48 provides an overview of differences in criminal justice outcomes for the two groups. Findings are classified as “positive” if a smaller proportion of program participants were involved with the juvenile justice system as compared to the study group and “negative” if a larger proportion of program participants were involved during the follow-up period.

Both the youth who participate in the program and those who were assigned to the study group have had relatively limited contact with the juvenile justice system during the follow-up period, but a smaller proportion of FGC participants were arrested, had sustained petitions, and were held in custody compared to study group participants. As with all past program years, overall, FGC participants had significantly less involvement with the juvenile justice system than study group participants did during the follow-up period.

Exhibit 48
Juvenile Justice Outcomes at Follow-up
Comparing Participants to Study Group Members: FGC

Outcome Measure	All Program Participants	Study Group	Sig.	Finding
Were Arrested (n=170), (n=31)	8.8%	35.5%	p<.001	Positive, statistically significant
With Sustained Petitions (n=170), (n=31)	5.3%	16.1%	p=.029	Positive, statistically significant
Were Incarcerated (n=50), (n=31)	5.9%	9.7%	p=.429	Positive, not statistically significant

Few FGC and study group participants were on probation and had restitution and court-ordered community service requirements to complete. For this reason, it is not possible to explore whether the program was effective in supporting participants to adhere to these requirements²¹.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Youth Assessment

To gather data on the impacts of Family Group Conferencing/Restorative Conferencing, LFA developed a youth assessment survey. The survey asked youth questions about their participation in the program, how they feel the program helped them, and what suggestions they have for improving the program. The survey was mailed, by the Sonoma County JPD, to youth participants at their homes. Results from the 15 youth responding to the survey are summarized in this section.

Overall, youth feel supported by staff at FGC in preparing for their conference, developing their plan, and completing their plan, as seen in Exhibit 49 below. On a scale of 1-4, with 4 being “a lot” youth rated all areas of support above 3.

Exhibit 49
Support from FGC

How much...	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	Mean (4-pt scale)
...did FGC/RC help you in preparing for your conference? (n=12)	0.0%	16.7%	25.0%	58.3%	3.42
...did FGC/RC help you in developing your plan? (n=12)	0.0%	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	3.33

²⁰ See Data Analysis and Presentation in the Approach Chapter (page 6).

²¹ FGC participants often have *non-court ordered* restitution and community service requirements they complete as part of the program, and FGC staff report that participants are highly successful at completing those requirements.

How much...	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	Mean (4-pt scale)
...progress have you made toward completing your plan? (n=11)	0.0%	9.1%	45.5%	45.5%	3.36

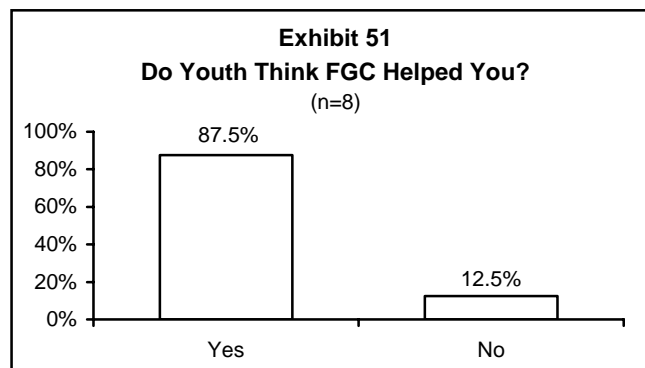
Youths' plans include a variety of activities they need to complete in order to repair the harm they have done, as seen in Exhibit 50 below. Most frequently (92.3%) have to volunteer or do community service. Over half (57.1%) also have to write letters of apology.

Exhibit 50

Activity	Plan Activities (n=14)	
	Number	Percent
Volunteer or do Community Service to Repair Harm Done	12	92.3%
Write Letters of Apology to Victims	8	57.1%
Apologize at or after Conference	6	42.9%
Pay for Damages or Loss	6	42.9%
Talk/meet with Program Staff on Regular Basis	6	42.9%
Go to School/GED Program	5	35.7%
Apologize Face to Face	3	21.4%
Volunteer or Provide Service to Victim	2	14.3%
Pay Back Restitution	2	14.3%
Get a Job	1	7.1%
Other	4	28.6%

* Totals and percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could check all that apply.

The majority of survey respondents (87.5%) feel that FGC has helped them, as seen in Exhibit 51 below.



In open-ended responses, youth described how FGC has helped them toward completing their plan and staying out of trouble moving forward. One youth said that FGC "has helped me come up with a solid plan and stick to it." Many youth indicated that FGC helped to understand the impact of their past behavior and actions. As one youth stated, FGC "taught me what the

"It helped me realize that people should do things after they have thought about the consequences."

- FGC Youth Participant

consequences are for doing bad stuff." Another said, "it really helped me wake up to the fact that as I get older, I'm more responsible for my actions." When asked how they would improve the program, most youth felt that the program was working in its current state. One youth put it plainly, "I don't know [how to improve the program] because it seems perfect for helping youth."

Victim Data

Restorative Resources administered a survey to victims who participated in the Family Group Conferencing/Restorative Conferencing process in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 program years. In 2003-2004, 32 victims responded out of the 177 victims who were sent a survey (18.1% response rate). In 2004-2005, 14 victims responded out of the 100 victims who were sent a survey (14% response rate).

“From my perspective, all parties benefited from this process. I found it to be community building and not polarizing.”
- FGC Victim Participant

Victims are highly satisfied with the FGC that they participated in. The majority of participants in each year rated the process above average (81.2% in 2003-2004 and 71.5% in 2004-2005). A significant group of participants rated the process as “excellent” (28.1% in 2003-2004 and 42.9% in 2004-2005). In addition, the majority of victims would recommend the process to their family, neighbors, and friends (78.1% in 2003-2004 and 71.4% in 2004-2005).

Exhibit 52

Victim Satisfaction with the FGC	Percent Responding “Yes” in 2003-2004	Percent Responding “Yes” in 2004-2005
Did you feel adequately prepared for the conference?	81.3%	100.0%
Would you recommend the process to family, neighbors and friends?	78.1%	71.4%
Were you satisfied with the FGC process?	87.5%	100.0%
Were you satisfied with the plan?	93.8%	92.9%

In open-ended comments, victims expressed praise of the process. When asked “What would you change to make the FGC better?” one victim responded, “No changes needed. This system is excellent for resolving problems such as we had in this case. The FGC staff member does an outstanding job. She is firm, but fair and worked with all parties in this case to what I believe is a happy ending for all.” A few victims expressed appreciation for the process and also offered suggestions for improving it going forward. Suggestions from victims include speeding up the process, making the FGC smaller with only necessary stakeholders in attendance, providing more supervision (beyond parental) to the offending youth, and having the youth provide a summary of what they learned at the conclusion of the process. Overall, victims are highly satisfied with the process and appreciate the opportunity to participate.

Staff Assessment

Evaluators conducted interviews with Restorative Resources’ staff and a handful of Family Group Conference Coordinators to hear their perspectives’ on the program, and the impact it has on participants.

“There is always a connection with the youth that makes the difference. We had a youth who vandalized bus stops and when the youth met with the employee who explained all that it entailed to fix the bus stop, the youth had an a-ha moment”.

- FGC Conference Coordinator

Staff and coordinators were able to speak to the ways that the program has an impact on all participants. In terms of youth, staff observe that youth demonstrate better decision-making skills after having participated in the plan development. They are more involved in their families, as one staff put it, “youth come home to be a part of their family again.” Youth experience a shift in negative behaviors – both in their home and in school. Most significantly, staff see very few youth reoffend. Staff believe that the process also empowers both parents and victims. For parents, they take away parenting skills and a better understanding of how to set limits for their child. For the victims, they are given a voice when they otherwise might not have had one. They have input

in the process and are able to experience healing while at the same time understanding the experience of the offender. Finally, staff see the community as a whole as a benefactor of the FGC. In many cases, there are multiple entities who participated in the process including the offender and his/her family, the victim, law enforcement, schools, and other entities. The youth sees the ripple effect throughout the community and the community gets to participate in the resolution.

CONCLUSION

The Family Group Conference/Restorative Conferencing program aims to support offending youth, their families, and victims to develop plans to repair the harm that has been done to victims and to the community as a whole. Both youth and victims report high satisfaction with the process. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, youth who participate in the process are less likely to re-offend and experience other positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem, increased interest in school and extra-curricular activities and a more positive outlook overall. The program has been effective in preventing youth from becoming involved with the juvenile justice system as well as decreasing their risk factors. Youth leave the program with a better understanding of the harm they have done and the impact of their actions on victims and the community at large.