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Family Group Decision Making Utilization
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Abstract
In 2002, Greater Minnesota Family Services (GMFS) began providing Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) services funded by a grant and Three Counties for Kids and is still provided today in five counties. These counties are Blue Earth, Brown, Nicollet, Sibley, and Watonwan all located in Southern Minnesota.

A survey was conducted to determine why the FGDM program is or is not utilized by county employees in the service area. Of county employee’s surveyed (N=25), 92% have used FGDM and 82% of those who identified their level of satisfaction (N=22) were satisfied to very satisfied with the services.

Research Questions
The purpose of this project was to evaluate the Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) program by:
1) identifying the number of families served between January 1, 2010 and May 1, 2010,
2) the reason referrals were made,
3) the recorded outcomes of these family groups, and
4) to identify why FGDM is or is not utilized.

Methodology
For questions 1, 2, & 3, Greater Minnesota Family Services (GMFS) collects data on each FGDM meeting. This secondary data was utilized to identify how many groups occurred, the reason for the meeting, and to identify the known outcome of each meeting.

For question 4, county employee’s working with families in Blue Earth, Brown, Sibley, and Watonwan county were surveyed. First consent was obtained from each county supervisor to conduct the survey of their employees, and then individual consent was obtained from each participant. Surveys were hand delivered to explain the reason for the survey and to answer questions. Participants were provided with a postage paid envelope to return their survey. From the four counties, 25 employees were provided with surveys.

Grounded theory was used to analyze collected data. Grounded theory builds from completed data to avoid constricting data into pre-determined categories (Seaman, 2008). Themes emerge from the data and “what really exist in the data” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p.4) instead of beginning with pre-determined categories that could cause the researcher to miss or ignore useful information. After all data were collected and completed using grounded theory, “similar data are grouped and conceptually labeled during a process called open coding” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p.2).

Data/Results
There were 18 families who participated in FGDM from January 1st, 2010 to May 1st, 2010. As described in the first pie graph, these meetings were for reunification of children with their family, safety and support, permanency with a non parent, and to preserve the family unit. Of these 18 FGDM meetings, 14 of the 18 had outcomes that matched the goal of the meeting. The goal of each FGDM meeting was identified at the end of each meeting by the participants, and the goal of the meeting was recorded if it was agreed upon. There were 2 participants who identified they did not use FGDM appropriately did not respond.

Alternative responses for the use of FGDM included: Participants and families get to create their own plan (N=4), FGDM brings families together and builds on family supports (N=4), use FGDM to aid in child protection investigations (N=1), and use FGDM to help children return to their own home (N=1).

One participant identified not being satisfied with FGDM because it takes too long to schedule a meeting and they feel the facilitator is too overwhelmed with job responsibilities to do a thorough job on the FGDM meeting.

Conclusions & Recommendations
The program evaluation of FGDM only reflects services as provided by Greater Minnesota Family Services. Participants and families get to create their own plan (N=4), FGDM brings families together and builds on family supports (N=4), use FGDM to aid in child protection investigations (N=1), and use FGDM to help children return to their own home (N=1).

Preferences and Limitations
The surveys were only conducted in four of the five identified counties of the service area due to time and access to the facilitators. The majority of surveys were focused in the service area of one group facilitator. The surveys were only provided to individuals physically present at the time of administration. This caused some employees to be excluded from the opportunity to provide their input. Completed surveys were mailed back to insure anonymity of participants and the data can not be individualized by county.

The program evaluation of FGDM only reflects services as provided by Greater Minnesota Family Services. The biggest concern of the services identified by participants was they felt one of the facilitators was overwhelmed with too many job responsibilities. One participant felt the facilitator could do the facilitation well if they were given an appropriate workload.

Recommendations based on the data collected include offering a training for individuals working with families and children in the counties served by GMFS. One recommendation comes from three survey’s identifying concerns with meetings taking too long to plan and this includes GMFS and their part time facilitator identifying job responsibilities to determine if the current workload is appropriate for the assigned tasks.

The final recommendation would be to conduct the survey in the missing county to determine if there are other needs in the service area.

Implications for Practice
FGDM is a strengths based approach that gives families a chance to be involved in the decision making process and determines what is best for the child. Data collected should be used to help increase provider knowledge of the FGDM program to help increase referrals and include more families in the decision making process.

References
References are available from the author upon request.