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FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE EXPERIENCES FROM THE

PERSPECTIVE OF VOLUNTEER FACILITATORS

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Communication

By

Rebecca Saunders

May 2016

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VOLUNTEER FACILITATORS

Communication

Missouri State University, May 2016

Master of Arts

Rebecca Saunders

ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of volunteer Family Group Conference (FGC) facilitators for the purpose of understanding how they experience and manage their role in the FGC process. By focusing on the benefits and challenges of volunteer FGC facilitators, this research adds a new perspective to the limited literature on FGC facilitators. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 11 volunteer Family Group Conference facilitators in order to create a deeper understanding of these volunteers' experiences. The Ecosystems Perspective and Uncertainty Reduction Theory created a framework for understanding the complex role of the FGC facilitator and allowed for a more detailed examination of their experiences. The findings from the research illustrate the rewarding, challenging, and emotionally-charged work of a volunteer Family Group Conference facilitator as well as the role communication plays in managing these experiences. Results also indicate that volunteer facilitators believe their presence as volunteers is comforting for participants in the FGC program and has a positive impact on the outcome of the conference. This research contributes to existing FGC and volunteer literature, and has implications for practice in the utilization of volunteers, as well as exposing issues that can be addressed to strengthen the process.

KEYWORDS: family group conference, facilitators, volunteers, communication, ecosystems perspective, uncertainty reduction theory

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Charlene Berquist, PhD
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
Missouri State University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Family Group Conferencing, also known as FGC, Family Group Decision-Making, and FGDM, is a family-focused, strengths-oriented, and community-based process that brings together family members, supportive friends and community members, social work professionals, and others who act collectively to work on problems and make decisions for and with families in crisis (Olson, 2009). It is a process that is focused on empowering clients through respect and a belief that a family knows what is best for itself. Prior to and during the conference, a trained facilitator helps family members communicate in order for them to create a plan of action to address the crisis and for the client's future success. These conferences are used in a variety of contexts such as child welfare, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse recovery. While studies have been undertaken to understand how the program affects the families and clients involved, the FGC process cannot be completely understood without more information on the facilitators and their experiences. This study explored the unique experiences of FGC facilitators in order to develop a better understanding of them. While most FGC facilitators are paid professionals, the present study focused on volunteer FGC experiences, including ways they cope with and express their role through communication.

Scholars agree that facilitators are critical to the success of the FGC program (Merkel-Holguin, Nixon, & Burford, 2003; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Paul & Dunlop, 2014). They work closely with the clients and families involved in the program and guide the FGC process from start to finish. Research suggests that their

close involvement with family members is particularly important because "perceptions of facilitator effectiveness may relate directly to outcomes" (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007, p. 57). Olson (2009) goes further by stating that "the success of FGC ultimately depends on the resources provided and the quality, experience, and skills of the coordinator and facilitator during the planning, conference, and implementation stages" (p. 58). The acknowledgement by multiple sources (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Paul & Dunlop, 2014) that facilitators play a critical role in the FGC process, especially in the outcome of the process, demonstrates the need for additional research on FGC facilitators and their perspectives and experiences. Because facilitators are a part of all the major components of Family Group Conferencing and their actions have such a major impact on the families involved, Chandler and Giovannucci (2004) call for more information on the individuals who are facilitating FGCs. The insights from facilitators are valuable not only in providing information about how better to train facilitators but also how to improve the FGC process. This would not only benefit the facilitators and organizations with FGC programs, but it would also benefit the families by laying the foundation for a stronger, more meaningful process.

In order to help develop a better understanding of the focus of the present research, the remainder of this chapter gives more details on Family Group Conferencing and facilitators in general.

Family Group Conferencing

In the late 1980s, New Zealand was experiencing an intense period of social and economic change (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). During this time, there was dissatisfaction

towards the existing child welfare and juvenile justice systems particularly by the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. The Maori were concerned that children from their tribe were being placed within foster care that was not consistent with their cultural values. The Maori value the inclusion of the extended family, especially when it comes to deciding what is best for the children. In order to address this growing issue, the New Zealand legislature adapted the traditional practices of the Maori people into the Children, Young Persons and Their Families (CYP&F) Act of 1989 (Levine, 2000). One aspect of the legislation is that every child has the right to an FGC in child welfare interventions. It is also a mandatory process for families of children in need of care and/or protection (Chandler & Giovannucci, 2004). As a result, the new law kept the Maori children within their families and their communities just as the Maori people desired (Godinet, Arnsberger, Li, & Kreif, 2010). Since the CYP&F Act became New Zealand law in 1989, the practice has spread to several other countries including the United States.

  The FGC Process. The FGC process usually begins with a family or client who is in crisis being referred to the program. A facilitator is then assigned to the case with the responsibility of organizing and facilitating the conference (Pennell, 2004). For the purpose of maintaining neutrality, some programs use separate individuals for the role of coordinating the conference and then for the role of facilitating it, but this is not a common practice (Nixon, Burford, Quinn, & Edelbaum, 2005). American Humane Association (2010) advocates for the same individual (or individuals) to both organize and convene the conference. Doing so keeps the process simpler and more cost-effective, limits the number of professionals involved with the family, and keeps the family

involved with the same individuals. Additionally, this structure is more manageable for small communities and organizations with fewer resources.

Once the family is referred to the FGC program, the facilitator meets with them to discuss the program in detail. Together they will plan for the conference by working on details such as date and time of the conference as well as who will be invited (Pennell, 2004). The FGC conference is comprised of three main stages: information sharing, private deliberation, and agreement. During the first stage, information sharing, the facilitator provides the family with all information needed to make informed decisions. Sometimes a social worker is present to assist with delivering this information. The next stage, private deliberation, gives the family private time to talk through issues and develop a plan. This stage is a key element of the process in that only family members are allowed. Finally, everyone comes back together and with facilitators review and agree on the plan developed by the family (Connolly, 2006b).

The simplicity of the FGC process is deceiving. It requires a paradigm shift when working with troubled families because it alters the power balance from the professionals to the families (Rauktis, McCarthy, Krackhardt, & Cahalane, 2010). This more inclusive approach focuses on family strengths rather than a family's shortfalls. Research shows that participants are more likely to comply with agreements of their own design (Chandler & Giovannucci, 2004). Comprehensive preparation is extremely important for both the facilitators and attendees and is often a significant predictor of an FGC's positive outcome. The amount of time put into preparation can have a great impact on number of attendees, conference dynamics, quality of the family's functionality in making decisions, and the conference outcome (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). Coates, Umbright, and Vos

(2002) report fairly positive responses from those who participate in Family Group Conferencing. They state that nine out of ten U.S. participants are satisfied with their FGC experience. Additionally, Pennell (2004) reports that participants are generally satisfied with their conferences and agreed that they achieved their objectives.

      Family Group Conference Facilitators. The facilitator is an integral part of the FGC process. It is a process that requires skilled facilitation, especially in regards to family dynamics (Connolly, 2006b). Scholars agree that the skill of facilitation plays a key part in the outcome of the conference (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Long et al., 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Olson, 2009; Paul & Dunlop, 2014). If done correctly, a facilitator will work closely with the family from the moment they are referred to the program until the final plan is drafted and agreed upon. On average, preparation for the conference will take the facilitator between 15 and 35 hours (Olson, 2009). Facilitators have several responsibilities related to engaging and preparing all participants in each FGC. This reliance on facilitator skills places significant responsibility for successful outcomes on the shoulders of the facilitators (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007).

      Ideally, FGC facilitators should be neutral with no vested interest in the conference outcome and no professional connection to the clients. Having a neutral facilitator safeguards the integrity of the FGC model and its principles (Nixon et al., 2005). Being aware of personal values and beliefs and the values of Family Group Conferencing helps to assure that facilitators abide by the principles of FGC as well as understanding the impact his or her actions may have on the process (Long et al., 2004). Facilitator beliefs can exert a strong influence on how the participants experience the FGC which can in turn affect the outcome. Paul and Dunlop (2014) set out to understand

how restorative justice facilitators (mainly in victim-offender conferences) constructed their beliefs on "justice." They concluded that it was necessary for facilitators to be aware of their beliefs and how their past experiences have shaped expectations.

Scope of This Thesis

The focus of this research is to gain a better understanding of FGC facilitators, specifically volunteers, by exploring their understanding of the FGC process, their role in that process, and their experiences in facilitating conferences. This chapter demonstrated that a greater understanding of FGC facilitators is essential due to their critical role in the overall process. In addition, it laid the foundation for the reader to understand how FGCs operate and the role facilitators take on in the process. The following chapter details the theoretical frameworks of the Ecosystems Perspective and Uncertainty Reduction Theory that guide the research as well as a more detailed explanation of Family Group Conferencing and facilitators. The chapter concludes with the research questions that form the basis for the research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Two different but complementary theories lay the groundwork in this study for examining the role of facilitators. The Ecosystems Perspective provides a broad structure for understanding the complex and layered context in which family group conferences occur and facilitators operate, whereas Uncertainty Reduction Theory is a framework which allows for a more detailed examination of the experiences of facilitators as they attempt to understand and navigate their role. What follows is a discussion of these theories and their contribution to understanding the role of facilitation in Family Group Conferencing.

The Ecosystems Perspective

The ecosystems perspective is an outgrowth of General Systems Theory (GST) that utilizes many of the same elements as GST. Both perspectives view complex networks as layered systems and in doing so allow a more complete understanding of the system and its parts (Meyer & Mattaini, 1995). Unlike linear thinking, systems thinking allows one to enter into a system at any point to explore and understand the interrelatedness of each component. For this research, the ecosystems perspective allows for clearer and more focused examination of the components of the larger systems in which FGCs take place and in doing so leads to a greater understanding of the facilitator role and the broader dynamics that impact it. In other words, this perspective provides a more comprehensive view of the volunteer FGC facilitator's reality.

In order to understand the ecosystems perspective, one needs to have a basic understanding of General Systems Theory. GST is built on the assumption that a system is made up of sets of interacting parts that function to become more than the sum of the individual parts. Like the ecosystems perspective, the idea is that a process like Family Group Conferencing can be better understood by identifying and examining the interacting components that comprise it. The theory goes further by providing a means to analyze the inputs and outputs that affect the system. Inputs are new resources, such as tangible materials, energy, or information, taken from the environment and processed in order to create an output that is introduced back into the environment. Another important aspect of this theory looks at understanding how each system sustains and controls itself over time (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011a).

While GST is a relatively abstract theory, the ecological perspective is a more concrete, less abstract conceptual framework (Meyer & Mattaini, 1995). This perspective is used in a variety of contexts including social welfare to understand the multiple environments a person lives within and is affected by. For this research, the ecosystems perspective is used as a framework for understanding the complex and multilayered system that a facilitator is a part of and operates within. Environmental factors and interactions have such an impact on individuals' behaviors, thoughts, and experiences that a thorough understanding of individuals cannot be achieved without identifying and examining the different environments or ecosystems that affect them. This is especially true for the role of the FGC facilitators. In Family Group Conferencing, a facilitator's ecosystem consists of self, peers, sponsoring organization, clients and families, professionals, referring agencies, community, and more (Pardeck, 2015).

Additionally, using the ecosystems perspective helped guide the research to assess inputs and outputs between individuals and their environments (Sherr, 2008). Using an ecological lens allowed this research to focus more on the micro-level interactions of individuals within the FGC system rather than the macro-level interactions between the systems as a whole. For example, Brady (2006) studied FGCs under an ecological lens in order to explore FGC principles in greater detail and expand the definition of family to a network of extended family, friends, and community members. Family Group Conferencing is a part of and works within the network of individual communities, families, behavioral health agencies, welfare agencies, and the criminal justice system. Through their interactions, these systems introduce inputs, for example the communication between the referring agency and the FGC organization, to develop outputs – the most notable being the family's agreed-upon plan. In a successful FGC, further outputs that may be created by the interactions of these systems are the strengthened relationships of family members as well as the creation of safer environments for children of FGC clients. The ecosystems perspective assists in explaining the make-up of an FGC and why it is important to grasp each component of the system in order to understand and improve the overall system.

The present study focused on the FGC facilitator as a component of the FGC system. Facilitators are not only a part of this system, but they also introduce inputs such as support, resources, and information that are processed to create outcomes in the overall system. Their skills, experiences, volunteer or professional status, access to resources, and more can have a great impact on the FGC system as well as the other systems that make up the overall FGC system. Facilitators interface with multiple complex ecosystems

while managing the FGC process. According to Meyer and Mattaini (1995), using this perspective "provides a framework for thinking about and understanding those networks in their complexity" (p.16). These additional systems may include the welfare system, the referral agency (if separate from the welfare system), the specific agency they are working for, and the volunteer agency they are working for among other systems. In some ways, the facilitator acts as a translator among the many agencies within the FGC system and the family.

The ecosystems perspective is also valuable in examining the interactions between volunteer FGC facilitators and the individual professionals within outside agencies. This relationship impacts the environment of each FGC including the experiences and perspectives of conference participants. Recognizing the dynamics of this relationship are essential to a greater understanding of facilitator experiences, the facilitator role, and issues that need to be addressed to strengthen the FGC process for all involved.

Facilitators play a key role in the FGC system and their actions affect all aspects of the system and those within it. This role can create a great deal of uncertainty for the facilitator when trying to make sense of and manage his or her role in the process. Not only do facilitators work to manage their own uncertainty, their role also calls for them to acknowledge and help reduce or manage uncertainty for their clients. In order to better focus on the uncertainty facilitator's face within the FGC system, this study paired the ecosystems perspective with a complementary theory, uncertainty reduction theory, which helped give more insight into the FGC facilitator's actions, perspectives, and experiences.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

In the mid 1970's, this theoretical perspective was proposed with the purpose of addressing the information-seeking behaviors of individuals who have just met (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This evolved into what is now known as Uncertainty Reduction Theory, or URT. According to this theory, the primary concern of people who are unfamiliar with one another is to reduce uncertainty or increase predictability about the other person. URT addresses multiple types of uncertainty, including descriptive, predictive, and explanatory. Descriptive uncertainty deals with the identity of individuals (Kramer, Meisenbach, & Hansen, 2013). Predictive uncertainty is proactive meaning it works with the expectation one has about another person's behavior and explanatory uncertainty is retroactive meaning it deals with the way one is better able to understand and explain another person's behavior (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011b). Individuals work to reduce these types of uncertainties by seeking more information about other people. Individuals engage in information-seeking behaviors through both verbal and nonverbal communication. Their communication is shaped by their goals for the relationship as well as the information they already have about the other person.

Uncertainty in Organizations. While URT began as an interpersonal communication theory, it has been used to expand the discussion of uncertainty management in groups and organizations as well. For decades, scholars have sought to understand how employees experience assimilation into organizational membership. The uncertainty that employees experience and manage has surfaced in a number of studies (e.g., Miller & Jablin, 1991; Nelson & Quick, 1991; Jablin, 2000; Scott & Myers, 2010). For example, Jablin's Organizational Assimilation Model (Jablin, 2000) provides a

framework for understanding an individual's assimilation into an organization. This model divides assimilation into three phases: anticipatory socialization, organizational encounter, and metamorphosis. Anticipatory socialization refers to an individual's knowledge of and interactions with an organization before actually becoming a member. The organizational encounter phase begins once the individual has entered the organization. New members seek to reduce uncertainty in this phase by gathering information in seven ways: overt questioning, indirect questioning, third-party questioning, testing rules, disguising conversations, observation, and surveillance. Metamorphosis is the transition phase from new member to insider.

Research suggests that uncertainty is highest when individuals enter the organization (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Scott & Myers, 2010). However, this uncertainty continues and evolves throughout an individual's time in an organization. Uncertainty extends to different levels within and outside of the organization. Scott and Myers (2010) explore an individual's socialization (including uncertainty and information-seeking behaviors) through the levels of individual, workgroup, organization, and society. Similar to the interacting components of a system, an individual must negotiate their role through many interactive layers in this model which creates uncertainty and the desire to reduce that uncertainty. One of the most helpful strategies for an organizational member to manage and reduce uncertainty is through communication with supervisors and peers (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Nelson & Quick, 1991).

Kramer et al. (2013) point out that most research concerning organizational membership focuses on employees. Because of the many differences in their roles, employees and volunteers may experience organizational assimilation and uncertainty

differently. In Kramer et al.'s (2013) research, they used URT to explore how volunteers manage uncertainty within the organizations for which they volunteer. The uncertainty they experience can revolve around not only their relationships within the organization, but also their roles and the organizational culture itself. This study concluded that volunteer members with higher levels of certainty within the organization were more satisfied with their membership. Those volunteers who were satisfied were more likely to recruit more volunteers for the organization. Some predictors of lowered uncertainty for the Kramer et al. (2013) study were task-related communication from organizational leadership, social-related communication from peers, perceptions of task difficulty, and adequate preparation time.

    FGC Facilitators and Uncertainty. FGC facilitators must manage or reduce uncertainty in multiple ways. First, they face uncertainty in understanding and managing their role in the FGC system. This role negotiation throughout the system creates uncertainty that the facilitators must address (Scott & Meyers, 2010). Because systems like social welfare are complex and the facilitator acts as a "go-between" amidst the interacting components, it can be difficult for facilitators to fully understand the system or where they fit within the system. Clients are working with others in the system before and after they participate in the FGC process. Facilitators understand this based on paperwork they receive and complete. However, there are many aspects of the system that can be confusing and can cause facilitators to question the program and their role responsibilities. Facilitators work hard to bring families together and help facilitate the development of a plan for the client and his or her family. Once they are finished with the conference, they are finished working with the family and, many times, do not know

what happens with the plan. This can create uncertainties for facilitators about their role in the success of families and the program.

Navigating through the system as a volunteer facilitator may create a higher level of uncertainty than a professional facilitator would face. Volunteer FGC facilitators interface with professionals in the system for the purpose of information-sharing on clients and the program. Obtaining such information is helpful for facilitators in reducing uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) in working with their clients. Professionals may not take volunteers seriously and may be skeptical of the FGC process and its focus on family empowerment which can lead to awkward, strained, or an absence of interactions. This may cause facilitators to lack the information needed to help reduce uncertainty particularly about the client and family. This also leads to uncertainty about how professionals view and characterize FGCs to clients and the extent to which plans created in FGCs are integrated into a client's plan moving forward.

The FGC process may seem simple on the surface, but the facilitator has a great deal of responsibility that is tied to the outcome of the conference (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Paul & Dunlop, 2014)..
Working with families presents a number of uncertainties for facilitators because each family is different and is made up of different dynamics. Facilitators will not begin to understand the dynamics of a family until they began to talk with everyone personally. They will not fully understand the dynamic until all of the family is in the same room together and they must try to manage discussion. Many times, clients have very strained relationships with family members and may not have seen them in months or years. Some family members may have a difficult time being positive or cooperative in a conference.

Conflict is often a part of a Family Group Conference. Being able to manage these dynamics is imperative in working toward a successful outcome (Olson, 2009). In this case, it is important for facilitators to reduce or manage uncertainty in order to build their confidence and develop the skills needed to be successful in their role. Moreover, facilitators not only work to lessen uncertainty for themselves but also for the clients and families they interact with during the FGC process.

By working to reduce uncertainty for conference participants, facilitators are adhering to the empowerment principle of FGC. This is one of many underlying principles that guide the FGC process. The next section presents these principles as well as a discussion on the importance of fidelity to the FGC model.

Principles and Model Fidelity of FGC

The principles of the FGC process are based on the practices of New Zealand's indigenous Maori tribe. Prior to the implementation of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, individuals noticed the disproportionate number of Maori children in the welfare system and recognized the harm of removing the children from their culture. Several Maori cultural practices have been incorporated into the FGC process including the belief that the family and extended family know what is best for their children and family, children are best kept with their family, and involving the extended family can best help repair the damaged life of family members (Olson, 2009).

In addition to these principles, there are several other goals and core values of the process that the FGC facilitator is responsible for understanding, implementing, and communicating. One of the most important values of FGC that is stressed in all literature

is the empowerment of the family. This means that the FGC process should stay family-driven and focused on family empowerment as opposed to the coercion and reduced family input that characterizes the traditional court system (Merkel-Holguin, 2004). Empowerment is achieved through detailed information-sharing and by encouraging family leadership in the form of active participation in decision-making (Chandler & Giovannucci, 2004). Ney, Stoltz, and Maloney (2013) advise that a facilitator's awareness of power and the political nature of social welfare contexts can assist in keeping the FGC an empowering process for families. It can be argued that adhering to the other values will result in attaining this central core value.

Chandler and Giovannucci (2004) list several underlying operational themes meant to support the principles and values of the FGC process: widening the family circle, putting the problem rather than the person at the center of the circle, taking/sharing responsibility for solutions, keeping it a culturally competent practice, building community partnerships, and respecting private family time. Pennell (2004) considered family leadership, cultural safety, and community partnerships as cornerstones of the FGC process. Merkel-Holguin (2004) discussed the need for the standardized principles of community building, democracy and family leadership. Connolly (2006b) examined the importance of adequate, frequent, and direct communication as a value.

A number of scholars (MacRae & Zehr, 2004; Olson, 2009) reference the FGC guidelines developed by the American Humane Association (2010) as being the gold standard in describing FGC principles and in guiding research. The following list highlights the key principles outlined by American Humane:

- Children have a right to maintain their kinship and cultural connections throughout their lives.

- Children and their parents belong to a wider family system that both nurtures them and is responsible for them.

- The family group, rather than the agency, is the context for child welfare and child protection resolutions.

- All families are entitled to the respect of the state, and the state needs to make an extra effort to convey respect to those who are poor, socially excluded, marginalized or lacking power or access to resources and services.

- The state has a responsibility to recognize, support and build the family group's capacity to protect and care for its young relatives.

- Family groups know their own histories, and they use that information to construct thorough plans.

- Active family group participation and leadership is essential for good outcomes for children, but power imbalances between family groups and child protection agency personnel must first be addressed.

- The state has a responsibility to defend family groups from unnecessary intrusion and to promote their growth and strength (American Humane Association, 2010).

The importance of focusing on these values and principles becomes clear in several arguments for the fidelity of the practice. Merkel-Holguin (2004) expresses concerns with the rising popularity of the process throughout the United States. Her article discusses the struggle for local communities in balancing the standard principles with local adaptations of the process. She believes that having varying models fits with the principles of FGC but more research needs to be done on what constitutes model fidelity. Chandler and Giovannucci (2004) argue that a consistent practice is essential, especially in regards to private family time. Parting from this component of the FGC process takes away from the value of family empowerment. Likewise, Olson (2009) warns about what she calls "model drift." New models that leave out critical elements of FGCs risk diluting the strong values that the process is known for. The many principles

and values discussed here can only be implemented if the coordinator/facilitator is well aware and strives to make sure they are respected. This is a great responsibility of the FGC facilitator. Although research has begun to focus on how facilitators work to maintain and manage fidelity principles in family group conferencing, more research is needed both about the management of fidelity and also the facilitator's role with the family.

It is important to note that FGCs are useful in a variety of contexts where the principles remain the same as what has been discussed, but the model may look different. In their survey of international practices, Nixon et al. (2005) found that 135 out of 529 surveyed (25.52%) used FGC for child welfare cases, which is the context where the majority of research is conducted. Youth/Juvenile Justice/Corrections came in second with 131 of the 529 surveyed (24.76%) using FGC in this context. The rest of those surveyed used FGC for domestic/family violence (13.61%), school conferences (13.42%), child mental health (12.48%), and other (10.21%) which includes families involved with drugs and alcohol among several others. The present study was conducted within the context of substance abuse recovery. Whatever the context, the FGC facilitator has many responsibilities related to skilled facilitation. The next section will give a brief overview of facilitation in general followed by a more detailed look at the ideal skill set for facilitating FGCs specifically.

Facilitation

Facilitation refers to guiding the process of a group's communication rather than the content of that group's communication. According to Hunter (2009), it gives a group

the means to achieve the goals they have agreed upon and is based on "values of equal worth, full participation, consensus and celebration of difference" (p.25). The individuals who work as the process guides are known as facilitators. Their principal responsibility is to increase the group's effectiveness by improving process and structure (Schwarz, 2002). The facilitator is impartial and should not be involved in the content of what the group is discussing. He or she is an expert on how the group communicates, not what they communicate about. This individual should be an active listener with clear communication skills. These skills include being able to stay on message, explaining in detail, asking questions to make sure the recipients understand, and matching nonverbal communication with verbal communication. It is important for the facilitator to be able to keep the group focused on its purpose (Hunter, 2009). In order to be effective in this, the facilitator must have an understanding of the content without becoming involved in it. With this understanding, the facilitator is better equipped to attend to group dynamics as well as to help create a safe and inclusive environment for the group participants (Long et al., 2004).

A facilitator needs to be present during facilitation. This means that he or she must be mindful and practice active listening. To those around them, it may appear as if facilitators are doing nothing at times when they are using the power of observation to understand the group in order to help keep them focused (Hunter, 2009). Part of observation is paying attention not only to what is being said, but also what is not being said by participants. Skilled facilitators are able to pick up on the unspoken cues and then use careful questioning to bring out those unspoken concerns and thoughts (Long et al., 2004). Furthermore, facilitators should be open-minded and able to work closely with

participants individually and together as a group.

Facilitators must be aware of the unique expectations, skill sets, and challenges that different contexts can bring. The next section concentrates on facilitation in Family Group Conferencing.

The FGC Facilitator Role

Although the literature has not fully explored the experiences of FGC facilitators, it does explain the role expectations of the facilitator in detail. The FGC facilitator role is a critical component of a successful FGC (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). Facilitators are responsible for organizing and overseeing the process (American Humane Association, 2010; MacRae & Zehr, 2004). The facilitator's most significant role is to prepare and engage all those involved (Merkel-Holguin & Wilmot, 2004). This involves contacting the client and thoroughly explaining the FGC process to them. This may take place over the phone or during a home visit to the client (Levine, 2000). They set up a potential time and place for the conference and then help them put together a list of extended family members they would like to invite to their FGC (Olson, 2009). The facilitator must then make sure each family member understands the FGC process and their part in it (Chandler & Giovannucci, 2004). During the conference, the facilitator guides the conversation to focus on the strengths and identify challenges of the client and family. Before and after the family has created a plan, the facilitator encourages creative decision-making to ensure a detailed and effective plan so the client and family can achieve their future goals. Each phase of the FGC is influenced by the quality and content of the facilitator's communication. Communicating clearly and effectively is a central

responsibility for the facilitator. This is shaped by the facilitator's understanding of and adherence to the core values of Family Group Conferencing. Undoubtedly, skilled facilitation in regards to managing communication within different family dynamics while maintaining model fidelity is essential to a successful FGC (Connolly, 2006b).

Throughout the process, it is important for facilitators to gain the family's trust. They should always act in a just manner so that the family will consider them an independent and impartial participant. If the facilitator has had any prior relationship with the family that could compromise the outcome in any way, a different facilitator should be assigned to the case (American Humane Association, 2010). Facilitators should do what they can to be more aware of existing family dynamics. Often, facilitators are faced with conflict during the FGC. With established trust and clear communication skills, the facilitator may be able to help the family resolve any hostility that surfaces (Olson, 2009). Emotions can run strong during a conference and facilitators must be able to manage this without taking over the conference. Facilitators should possess basic mediation skills and be well-organized. Equally important, facilitators should have strong empathy with others and be committed to empowering the family group (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). All of these requirements for a good facilitator show that, although rewarding, the facilitator role is an emotionally and physically demanding role (American Humane Association, 2010). Chandler and Giovannucci (2004) ask the question, "Who are the FGC facilitators and does the process/outcome change depending on the expertise of the facilitator?" (p. 227). This question embodies the pressure facilitators encounter when preparing for and conducting an FGC. Knowing the success of an FGC lies in the skills of the facilitator could significantly increase anxiety and uncertainty for the facilitator.

Facilitator Experiences. While FGC literature and research discuss the facilitator role and necessary skills in detail, there is little focus on professional FGC facilitator perspectives and no focus on volunteer FGC facilitator perspectives. At this time, there have been a short series of studies from Marie Connolly (2004, 2006a, 2006b) and one additional study (Slater, Lambie, & McDowell, 2015) that specifically sought out the experiences of professional FGC facilitators in New Zealand. Finally, Brady (2006) presented results on a Family Welfare Conference (FSW) program evaluation which sought the perspectives of the three FSW coordinators responsible for a three-county area in Ireland. This section discusses the perspectives of professional FGC facilitators in more detail.

Connolly (2006a) interviewed ten FGC facilitators who had helped implement the process when New Zealand's Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act first went into effect in 1989. All of these individuals were either social work professionals before getting the position or they had worked in a related field. The article focused on how the facilitators experienced changes in the process during the legislation's first 15 years, what attracted them to the position, and what keeps them in the position. Throughout the article, tensions between balancing family support and child protection functions of an FGC were illustrated. One aspect of their role that kept them in their position was the satisfaction they experienced by helping families come together to create solutions. They also expressed feelings of stress, tension, frustration, discomfort, burnout, nervousness, support, and pride.

Slater et al. (2015) recently conducted interviews and focus groups with experienced professional Youth Justice Co-ordinators in New Zealand. The goal of their

research was to understand the perspectives of these facilitators concerning New Zealand's Youth Justice Family Group Conference process. The researchers found that these individuals felt a strong commitment to the FGC principle of empowerment. They also felt that their role as co-ordinators positioned them as guardians of the process. Moreover, these facilitators strongly believed that their role require a varied set of skills. "In addition to strong organizational and relationship-building abilities, Co-ordinators described their skill-set as including: facilitation, mediation, conflict resolution, negotiating abilities, motivational interviewing techniques, and navigating group dynamics (including handling strong emotions)" (Slater et al., 2015, p. 633). In addition, they deemed passion and hopefulness as personal qualities that an effective facilitator should possess. As professionals, they complained of high workloads that put facilitators in the position to get conferences completed quickly rather than focus on making them a quality experience for the families.

Brady (2006) interviewed three Family Welfare Conference (a form of FGC) coordinators for a program evaluation in the Irish counties of Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon. Each facilitator was assigned to one of the counties. The coordinators felt positively about the program's benefits for families and believed it could be implemented in a broad range of contexts. They felt tensions with the professionals that refer to the program that rose from inappropriate referrals, referrers being too involved in what they wanted to happen in the conference, and referrers being unrealistic with their expectations for the process. Coordinators also believed that their independence from referring agencies was important for balancing power and that this is a positive for the families. Lastly, they discuss at length the challenges of managing family dynamics,

especially in a system where many cases involve domestic abuse.

This limited view of FGC facilitator experiences is taken from the experiences of professional facilitators. Virtually no research has examined the role of volunteer FGC facilitaors. A detailed discussion about volunteers in Family Group Conferencing follows.

FGC Facilitators as Volunteers. While the literature makes it clear what skills are desired in an FGC facilitator, there is no consensus on who should be recruited or what skill set they should have as a facilitator. For example, should FGC facilitators be paid professionals or community volunteers? On one hand, volunteer facilitators are perceived to be more neutral because they are independent of the sponsoring agency and, therefore, do not have stake in the outcome of the conference. They are able to help balance the power in favor of the families (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). By using volunteers, the direct involvement of those in authority is limited resulting in a greater sense of empowerment for the families. On the other hand, the credibility of volunteer facilitators may be questioned by the social workers, referring agencies, and others. Some criticisms revolve around the volunteer's lack of knowledge when it comes to the child welfare or criminal justice system. As for facilitators employed with the agency, there is a perception that they are more qualified to work on FGC cases because of their background in social work. In many cases, facilitation duties are added on to their existing work duties which may cause more stress to the employee. This could result in a rushed FGC that does not fully address the family's concerns. An additional concern is how the professional facilitator's power status will influence the outcome of the conference (Nixon et al., 2005).

The explanation above argues the importance of acquiring more information on volunteer FGC facilitators. While volunteers may work to achieve organizational goals like employees, they are likely to experience their roles differently than an employee who is monetarily compensated (Thornton & Novak, 2010). Furthermore, research shows that volunteers experience uncertainty in their roles differently than paid employees due to different psychological contracts. For paid employees the psychological contract involves exchanging labor for monetary compensation and job security while the volunteer psychological contract involves exchanging labor in order to fulfill motivations to help others and serve the community (Kramer et al., 2013). Finally, volunteers experience and manage emotions differently than employees. For example, employees can manage emotions with the knowledge that they are getting paid for their emotional labor while volunteers struggle with the concept of their emotion work not pertaining to a "real" job. Moreover, employees may have an easier time separating their "personal" and "professional" lives while these often overlap for volunteers (e.g. using personal time to perform professional volunteer duties). Employees can also gain from volunteers emotion work in the workplace and also have expectations for how the volunteers perform. In addition, because of their lower status, volunteers may end up with a disproportionate amount of the emotional work that employees pass on to them (Thornton & Novak, 2010). It makes sense to assume that volunteer FGC facilitators are having different experiences than those employed as facilitators which makes research on volunteer FGC facilitators a necessity.

FGC participants seem to recognize and appreciate the independence of an outside facilitator, whether they are a volunteer or not. Barnsdale and Walker (2007)

found that agencies and social workers also saw the benefit in using independent facilitators. They ultimately recommend independent facilitators for FGCs due to the positive outcomes seen in conferences. Nixon et al. (2005) reported that almost two-thirds of FGC facilitators are not independent. They are employed by the referring agency. Twenty-five percent of all FGC facilitators are paid contractors. A mere 10% work as unpaid volunteers and less than five percent work as paid volunteers. It is no wonder that the small amount of research on FGC facilitators focuses on professionals employed with the referring agency.As volunteer FGC facilitators, individuals are likely to experience their roles much differently than paid FGC facilitators.

Summary

The purpose of this research is to expand the knowledge about FGC facilitators, specifically volunteers, by focusing on their experiences. This section outlines what is known and what is not yet known about FGC facilitator perspectives and experiences.

What is known:

- Facilitators are an integral part of the FGC process and their work contributes to the successful outcome of FGCs (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Paul & Dunlop, 2014).

- Communication skills are necessary for FGC facilitators. They are responsible for preparing all family members for the conference and helping the family communicate during the conference (Connolly, 2006b).

- The majority of FGCs facilitators are employed by the referring agency and are, therefore, not independent (Nixon et al., 2005).

What is not known:

- How volunteer facilitators experience FGCs differently than professional facilitators

- What motivates volunteers to become involved in the FGC program and to continue volunteering with the program

- What challenges volunteer FGC facilitators experience

- How facilitators are affected by and manage uncertainty

- How facilitators are affected by the emotions they experience during the FGC process and how those emotions are managed

Research Questions

The focus of this thesis is outlined in the following research questions:

RQ1: How do volunteer FGC facilitators understand and experience their role in the FGC process?

RQ2: What are the greatest challenges volunteer FGC facilitators experience and how are those challenges managed?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

It is clear from Family Group Conferencing literature that scholars are in agreement that the facilitator role is a critical component of the FGC process (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Paul & Dunlop, 2014). The outcome of the conference is directly tied to the skills of the facilitator. Due to their critical role in the FGC process, it is necessary to understand more about FGC facilitator experiences in order to help improve the process for both the facilitators and the participants. The current study seeks to do that by identifying how facilitators understand and manage their role in the process. This study explores challenges that FGC facilitators face including how they experience and manage uncertainty.

This chapter describes the methods used to address the research questions for the present study. The first section reviews the justification and rationale for this research. Afterward, the study's context and participants are described in detail followed by the procedures for the study. Finally, this chapter provides a description of the data analysis procedures that were used. The subsequent chapters report the results from this research and provide an in-depth analysis of those results.

Justification and Rationale

In order to understand the experiences of volunteer FGC facilitators in a meaningful way, this study uses qualitative research methods. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study because it is the type of research that places emphasis on "qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined

or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency"
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). The meaning comes from the stories that are shared
during interviews. It comes from the researcher's observations and interpretations of the
interviewee's reactions while speaking and the emphasis placed on certain features of the
stories. Through in-depth interviews with volunteer FGC facilitators, I have used one of
the "most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow humans"
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 697).

Participants

For this study, participants were volunteer facilitators with the Center for Dispute
Resolution's (CDR) Family Group Conferencing program. The CDR functions as part of
a university communication department and provides collaborative programming for a
number of community agencies. The CDR offers a number of programs including Girls
Circle, Boys Gathering, Peer Mediation and Family Group Conference training and
facilitation. Student and community volunteers are a significant aspect of programming at
the center. A significant piece of the CDR's programming is in Family Group
Conferencing. The CDR coordinates FGCs for Preferred Family Healthcare (PFH)
through the Regional Partnership Grant (RPG) program designed to provide services for
clients recovering from substance abuse. The CDR also partners with the Greene County
Juvenile Justice Center as a resource for juveniles. FGCs are a requirement for RPG
clients and girls who are referred to the CDR's Circle for Girls program by the Juvenile
Justice Center.

The CDR's FGC facilitators are required to attend in-depth training that takes place over two or three days. Once trained, volunteer facilitators have several opportunities to participate in continuing education sessions where they are able to participate in role plays, learn any new program information, ask questions, and interact with other FGC facilitators. After the initial training, facilitators are paired with experienced facilitators until they feel comfortable co-facilitating with a less-experienced co-facilitator. Two facilitators are assigned to each FGC case.

Research Design and Procedures

Prior to beginning this research, I sought and received IRB approval through my institution (#16-0063; September 24, 2015; see Appendix A). Once granted, I collaborated with the Center for Dispute Resolution to find suitable participants for this study. Participants for this study are or have been FGC facilitators and have varying experience levels with the program. All interviewees have participated as volunteers with the Center for Dispute Resolution's Family Group Conferencing program and have co-facilitated at least two or more conferences with the exception of one interviewee, who attended training only. The purpose of this research design was to help develop a more complete understanding of the experiences of volunteer FGC facilitators. The design allowed facilitators to elaborate on what it means to be a new facilitator seeking to understand his or her role and also allowed more "seasoned" individuals to discuss what it means to be an experienced volunteer working with the program. A total of 11 qualitative in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted. According to Tracy (2013), "face-to-face interviews provide the opportunity to create rapport and to collect both

verbal and nonverbal data" (p. 160). The interviews were semi-structured to encourage discussion and give more control to the interviewee. Unstructured interviews allow for the "interviewee's complex viewpoints to be heard without the strict constraints of scripted questions" and are also more "likely to tap both content and emotional levels" (Tracy, 2013, p. 139). The interview protocol allowed individuals to elaborate on their experiences as FGC facilitators. This type of interviewing provided an opportunity for respondents to explain how they understand their role in an FGC as well as the chance to tell stories that give specific examples of their experiences (Tracy, 2013).

A total of 17 potential interviewees were invited to participate in this research project through email and 11 participated. As a request would be granted, I would schedule the interview around the convenience of the interviewee and send a reminder the day before the interview. To show appreciation for their willingness to participate, each participant received a $5 gift card for coffee and a personal thank you note. Interviews lasted between 35 and 95 minutes and were conducted using flexible interview protocols for both new facilitators (Appendix B) and experienced facilitators (Appendix C). The protocol developed for new facilitators was only used for two interviews. During the second interview using this protocol, I began bringing in questions from the "experienced" protocol to help the interviewee elaborate on personal experiences. From then on, the "experienced" protocol was used for each interview with some of the wording tailored to the interviewee's experience level. Interview questions were developed through a brainstorming session with CDR staff members and focused on ways to bring out how volunteer facilitators' experience and understand the FGC process and their role within it. Questions looking for volunteer facilitator understanding asked

interviewees to describe the FGC process and how they see their role in the FGC system. Questions developed to explore volunteer FGC facilitator experiences asked interviewees about their initial expectations for the program and actual program experiences. They were also asked about what did/does keep them motivated to volunteer. Finally, questions used to understand the challenges that volunteer facilitators experience asked facilitators to discuss any emotions and uncertainties they have experienced at any time in the FGC process and how they manage those. Facilitators were also asked to discuss how families experience uncertainty and how the facilitators help families manage that uncertainty.

The interview location was chosen based on what was convenient for the participant. Each participant signed an informed consent document which was explained to them in detail prior to the interview (Appendix D). By discussing and signing the consent form, each interviewee agreed to the interview being audio recorded. All interviews were transcribed in their entirety. For the purpose of confidentiality, each individual was assigned a pseudonym for reporting results.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I wrote down reflections from that interview. Any themes that stood out to me and any reactions from the participants that could not be heard on the recording were written down. Then I listened to the interview, looking for missed opportunities to ask probing questions and also for anything that did not work well in the interview. Through this process, I would change the wording to questions, remove questions that did not work, and add probing questions in time for the next interview. While changes were made to the interview protocols, they were minor changes meant to

help with the flow of the interview and did not affect the content of the original questions. Once I listened to the interview, I would take additional notes on what stood out to me or how that interview related to any prior interviews. By taking such detailed notes, I realized by the last couple of interviews that the data was becoming saturated. Interviewees continued to bring up similar themes and types of experiences. By the eleventh interview, I knew I had enough data to proceed with the analysis.

Transcriptions and reflections produced 221 pages of data. Once transcriptions were complete, the data was read holistically. From the first reading, I noted areas of interest and possible themes. During the second reading, each complete thought was highlighted and labeled with one or more themes or descriptions. This resulted in an initial coding. From there the data was reread and analyzed further to produce more specific coding. Tracy's (2013) explanation of iterative analysis helped guide this process. She maintains that an iterative approach "encourages reflection upon the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data" (Tracy, 2013, p. 184). Through this process, data segments were moved into Word documents under appropriate themes. Some data segments were included under multiple themes.

Themes were organized by research question and presented as results with discussion integrated throughout. Chapters four and five present the results of each research question as well as discuss the analysis in-depth. Limitations and areas for future research are discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The first research question focuses on how volunteer FGC facilitators understand and experience their role in the FGC process. While everything discussed in the interviews can technically fall under a question focused on experiences, I felt the challenges that these volunteer facilitators experience and manage deserved a separate emphasis and in-depth discussion. Within this chapter, results reveal how facilitators understand the FGC program and their role as volunteer facilitators within it. This discussion includes a look at how volunteer facilitators perceive their role as compared to the role of professional FGC facilitators. There is also an examination of the motivations that brought individuals into the program and have kept them volunteering.

Volunteer FGC Facilitators' Understanding of the Program and Their Role

Recognizing the ways volunteer Family Group Conference facilitators understand the FGC program as well as their role as facilitators within it brings context to the experiences of these facilitators. For example, if an individual believes deeply that it is a facilitator's responsibility to protect the client from negative attacks during the FGC then it would make sense that this particular facilitator would feel like a failure if they cannot prevent such an attack from happening. Additionally, scholars agree that the facilitator role is an important one with many responsibilities (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Paul & Dunlop, 2014). It was interesting to see how the beliefs of these individuals line up with the research. The next sections will show how facilitators describe the FGC program, its benefits and disadvantages, and how

they see their role as facilitators. There will also be a discussion on why they believe their role is important.

Facilitator Descriptions of the FGC Program. All of the facilitators spoke positively of the FGC program in general. It was clear that although each facilitator had his or her share of negative experiences, they still believed the program was a positive one and had great benefits for families. Many hailed it an opportunity. Mary described it simply as "an opportunity for a family member who's trying to start over to meet with other friends and family who agree to meet with them, to develop a support system, for them to be able to start over in a different environment with a different set of circumstances." All of the descriptions of the program had similar elements which exhibit fidelity to the FGC model and principles. Facilitators focused on the program's supportive element of bringing people together to help an individual through hard times.

> It's a process that involves an individual or individuals that because of drug abuse have hit a really difficult time in their life. Family services has stepped in, they've usually lost their kids. They are in the process of rehab, maybe just off drugs or maybe off a while, but they're trying to put their life back together and they need a support group to help them do it. What we're doing is pulling together that natural support group of people around them to help them come up with a very specific strategy and a plan that they will follow to get their life back together, and it will be the details of meeting the state's requirement. It'll include jobs, it'll include family life, places to live and support and that type of detail, with the hope that this support group will hold them accountable and help provide the support they need so that they can get their life on track. (Gene)

Like Gene, many facilitators talked about the program in its context of substance abuse recovery. They described it as something those individuals needed to help them get back on track. In some interviews, the interviewee would talk as if they were speaking directly to the client:

> It's an opportunity for you to get together with your family member, support people, any of those people that have an influence in your life or that you want to

35

have an influence in your life as you're moving forward. It's an opportunity for you to get together with those people and have a say on what's going on and state to someone, "What do you need right now?" Right now, you have a lot of people telling you what you need and you have a lot of systems in place. You and your family are going to know yourselves better than any of those people coming into your lives will. It's an opportunity for you to talk about that. See what you need and see if we can come up with something to meet those needs. (Norah)

Facilitators showed they believed that FGC was an opportunity while they discussed the ways they viewed the program to be beneficial to clients and families.

Benefits of FGC. It was evident that facilitators strongly believed that the FGC program was beneficial for families. William explained his belief that benefits are seen beyond the client and the immediate family:

> I think it's very beneficial not only to the individual and not only to the immediate family but it's actually beneficial to the enlarged circle that you're bringing in because you're giving them an opportunity to help another human being. It's always beneficial to us if we help another human being. That's an interesting question because the measurement of what it does to help people should not be limited to just the client or just the client and the child. (William)

The Family Group Conferencing principle of "widening the family circle" is meant for this very reason. Involving more members of the family and community helps to spread the benefits of FGC. Getting others involved was seen as a huge benefit for many reasons. Facilitators talked in-depth about how the process builds or rebuilds relationships. This was considered one of the most important outputs from the FGC system. There was acknowledgement that the clients have probably damaged many relationships in their past and if those relationships are brought back to the table it could go a long way in helping mend that hurt. Sonya talks about it from this perspective:

> I think the biggest [benefit] is having that conversation because these women, by the time they've reached this point, have likely burned just about every bridge that they have… We all carry our baggage from all of our families and unless they have just this amazing healthy family, it would be really hard for somebody with substance abuse issues who has had Children's Division involvement to come

back to their family without their family just being like, "I told you so." and just all that unproductive stuff that we all feel sometimes. But, it doesn't help and it doesn't move forward and it doesn't build bridges. I feel like the FGC is just a great bridge for that client with her family to try to help manage some of that and create a productive conversation so that they have the opportunity to move forward. (Sonya)

Facilitators also understood that the FGC process was not a normal one for families. Sitting down with other friends and family members to develop a plan for someone is not usually something that families are in the habit of doing. The FGC process brings families together to have conversations in a productive way. Gene describes this as "exposure to good conversation." He goes on to say, "I've had a few comments after these by some of the people that were there saying to us things like, 'We've never been able to talk together like this.'" Facilitators acknowledge that this is very important because it helps to create "buy-in," a word that a few of the interviewees used while talking about benefits. Research shows that creating this "buy-in" is beneficial to families and the success of the FGC program because once participants are committed to developing their own plans, they are more likely to follow through with them (Chandler & Giovannucci, 2004). This acknowledgement that guiding families through good conversation helps to create buy-in from those involved has implications for the success of the program. Krista explained that bringing friends and family together to help develop a plan for the client is beneficial because "it creates buy-in and so it creates a situation where they're going to be able to hold that person accountable better because they know the details of it. They're going to be more invested in this since they had a part in creating it." This shows that the facilitators believe that clients are more likely to follow a plan created during an FGC because they are more involved in its creation. Their

talk of "buy-in" and "ownership" shows that facilitators believe the process is a helpful

and worthwhile one.

One of the most obvious outputs of the FGC process is that a plan is created for

the client to help them in their recovery and future success. While some facilitators did

point this out as a benefit, all of the facilitators chose to focus on the relationship aspects

as being the most beneficial. In fact, when the plans were talked about at length, it was

more to discuss why they were not the biggest benefit of the conference. Norah and

Sonya both felt strongly about this point:

> You never really know what happens to the plan afterwards. Knowing that there's
> still a benefit even if that doesn't do anything two weeks a month from now, they
> still have that experience together and they're modeling what it looks like to make
> a plan and to talk about these things. That's something that they can take with
> them no matter where they go. (Norah)

> Even if one thing of the plan didn't work maybe even nothing of the plan that this
> family comes up with really works out long term. But getting that family together
> to have those conversations and facilitating a safe place for them to do so, that
> was worth everything. That's what I wish that the professionals would get.
> (Sonya)

These results suggest that going through the motions of developing a plan, rather than the

plan itself, is what is most meaningful in a Family Group Conference. For these

facilitators, the fact that clients and families are rebuilding relationships and building

support systems is what makes the program a success.

Finally, facilitators tout that FGC is beneficial because of its empowerment

aspect. Family Group Conferencing is designed to be an empowering process for the

client and family members. Slater et al. (2015) found that coordinators have a

professional and personal commitment to the concept of family empowerment. Scholars

report that this happens by keeping the process family-driven (Merkel-Holguin, 2004)

through detailed information-sharing and encouragement of family participation (Chandler & Giovanucci, 2004). Ney et al. (2013) argued that the facilitator must be aware during all aspects of the FGC in order to keep it an empowering process. Mary asserts that this awareness starts at the beginning through careful preparation: "If you can prepare them so that they understand that what they say is going to make an impact, and what they do by being there is going to make an impact, and you can convey seriousness without it being negative. Without being too overwhelming about it. Then, it would set the tone for everybody being there." Mae insists the empowerment happens when families understand they are in control: "I think that once you help them understand that they're in control and they have the power to do it, that's it. That's what it is to me. It's for once in your life not having a government agency saying, 'We're going to take care of this and we're going to take care of that.' It's you." The empowerment aspect is a crucial component of the Family Group Conferencing process, which means that facilitators must be fully committed (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). Slater et al. (2015) found that this is an area where facilitators take their commitments seriously. This research supports that finding by showing facilitators are not only fully aware that the FGC program is supposed to empower the participants, but also know their responsibility in making sure that happens and following through on it.

The facilitator sets the tone through communication and then helps guide the family along the process while making sure the family is in charge in order to ensure it is an empowering process. Many facilitators talked about the empowerment of the declaration of client "strengths" at the beginning of the conference as something that really stands out. "I think that strengths too is a big thing. Having the clients hear those

39

strengths and having the family members say those things." Norah goes on to say, "I have heard clients cry just during the strengths part, just out of joy, I guess, or in awe of what was said about them." Sonya also describes this aspect of the conference in reference to empowerment: "We start off with strengths. Not only the strengths of the client but the strengths of the family unit. I think that can be an empowering point of it. I think it also gives the family, it empowers them to be able to help. To know how to help."

While facilitators were quick to portray the FGC process as empowering, Meredith wanted to talk about the reality that it may not always be empowering for the family: "I think the theoretical under-pinning of it is very empowering and I think it's meant to be empowering, but there were times where I didn't feel like the families were empowered, and I think that might be because maybe they just didn't buy into the strengths that they were told or buy into the level of support that they had." She said that she never felt like anyone was disempowered, but that they were not necessarily empowered. It seems like she is saying that the clients are the ones who ultimately have to accept that empowerment. For those who do not accept it or who are not given that chance, FGC can turn into more of a disadvantage than a benefit.

Disadvantages of FGC. One of the most interesting realizations from these interviews is that facilitators are more willing to take blame than praise. Mae, for example, was very hesitant to talk about how she as a facilitator contributed to the success of an FGC. Instead, she proclaimed, "I think I can certainly contribute if it doesn't succeed. I would certainly take that as part of my responsibility if it wasn't succeeding which is what bothered me so much about the very last one I did. I also know that really I'm just an instrument in the room." All facilitators agreed that the FGC

process could become disempowering or a disadvantage to clients and families and most

believed the facilitator had a role in that. According to William, this can go wrong at the

beginning if the facilitator is not working with the program with the right mindset or

attitude.

> Well, I think the mindset of the facilitator is very important. I think mindset trumps technique. The way you're thinking as a facilitator toward that person is a very powerful thing… Most of the clients in these situations feel very degraded by just everything that's happening in their life and a lot of it is self-imposed but they really need respect. A facilitator has to really have a heart that values the human being as a human being and sees the potential in that person that maybe other people can't even see. When you're seeing that and you're valuing them and you're communicating that value in a thousand different ways, that is empowering. If you come in with your nose stuck in the air… that you're the professional and you're the one that's got it together to lead them through the system to get their act together too they're going to also feel that and feel even more degraded. (William)

Interviewees believed that it was the responsibility of the facilitator to make sure the

client feels empowered. The process can easily go wrong if the client is not feeling

support and that begins with the facilitator. Facilitators expressed that the process can be

a disempowering one for clients if negative family members are allowed to take over the

conference. While this may happen during the private family time when facilitators are

not present, facilitators still believed it was their responsibility to communicate those

boundaries ahead of time.

> Just managing some of those family dynamics I think can be absolutely crucial. I can think of a couple of different experiences where there was either one or two really strong voices around the table. Even if you go into some of the psychology of why people have addictions or struggle with that in the first place, they likely have a history of where there's been poor boundaries or just low self-esteem or there are times where they've been victimized and they don't have their voice. If we don't set up a framework for them to find their voice or express the things that they need to, I feel like we've failed then. Now, we can't do that for them. It's ultimately up to them if they choose to articulate some of those things, but if we don't make it a safe place and bring balance to the people around the table and do

our best to do that, then I feel like we failed the process and failed that client. (Sonya)

Connolly (2006b) recognized that this process requires individuals with great facilitation skills, particularly when managing family dynamics. Scholars stress that this plays a key part in the conference's outcome (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Long et al., 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Olson, 2009; Paul & Dunlop, 2014). Facilitators are aware of the importance of these skills and know that managing family dynamics can be a burdensome task. However, they accept that responsibility.

Facilitators also place the responsibility of disempowering a client and family on the outside agencies who work with the families before and after the FGC. According to them, this happens when the outside agencies are requiring things that seem impossible and also when they outright dismiss the plan as unimportant or not what they want to see.

> I think when the plan that's laid out is so impossible to accomplish. I remember [another facilitator] and I talking once and she and [another facilitator] had done a family conference and it was very similar. It was a man and a woman and they had an infant and a bicycle. They had one bicycle and they lived in town. They had a little baby, a little infant. Everywhere they went, whether it was to work or the grocery store or a doctor's appointment or an agency meeting that they had to attend, they had one bicycle. [That facilitator] had read the plan that came from the agency and she said to me, 'I don't know how these people can do this.' Even though you're empowering the people, it's like you're setting them up to fail because they don't have what they need to be able to do what they're supposed to do. (Mae)

> Well I think when we were talking about how there is a lot of focus on the plans that came out of it. I think one way that it can be disempowering is if it's all kind of a façade and we say come here and do this and this will be your plan and it goes back and people say no, that's not a good plan we're not going to use it. I think that's really disempowering for them because they've not only been vulnerable to put themselves out there to say this is what I need and this is how we can do it with our resources and how it can get done. Now they've been told that that's not good enough or that's not appropriate and so it's all taken away and we've just kind of brushed it all aside. I think that's almost more detrimental than never doing it all. (Sonya)

During the interviews, facilitators were empowering the clients by giving them most of the credit for a successful FGC. While they acknowledged that clients and families do play a role in an unsuccessful or disempowering FGC, they ultimately place the blame on themselves or an outside agency. These facilitators absolutely believe it is in their role to set up the conference in a way that it is empowering. The next section discusses in more detail how these volunteer FGC facilitators view their role and responsibilities in the FGC process.

Facilitator Explanations of the FGC Facilitator Role. Interviewees spoke of the facilitator's role throughout each interview in many different ways. This section will focus on the times when facilitators specifically described the aspects of an FGC facilitator's job. There is also a detailed discussion on the uncertainties that clients and families face and the ways that facilitators work to help them reduce that uncertainty. Lastly, there will be a description of the array of skills and personality traits that facilitators believe are important for FGC facilitators to possess.

<u>An FGC Facilitator's Role.</u> First and foremost, understanding the FGC program and the facilitator role is vital for a facilitator to perform his or her job well and to clearly communicate all of this to clients and families. Facilitators stressed that being able to articulate who they are, their role, and the purpose of the program is an extremely important part to preparing participants for their involvement in the FGC process. Krista agreed that a facilitator must "be able to describe the process in a way that is understandable to everybody there." A facilitator can only achieve that when he or she has a good grasp on the program and the facilitator role.

From there, William gives a basic overview on his role as a volunteer FGC facilitator:

> [My role is] purely as a facilitator to help the communication primarily by bringing the people together, providing a setting and some guidelines for that so the family and friends can communicate effectively and give them a little bit of reality check on their plan after they made it as to "are there areas that we need to talk about that might need to be detailed out more?" or something like that. (William)

This description contains many of the elements of an FGC facilitator's role that emerged in all of the interviews. According to facilitators, they need to be prepared and organized for their conferences. This involves helping the client gather supports by calling those the client chooses to invite to the conference and explaining everything in a way that gets them interested in participating. The facilitator is responsible for keeping track of commitments up until the time of the conference. This supports scholars' agreement that comprehensive preparation is a chief responsibility of facilitators once they are assigned a case. The level of preparation is a significant predictor of whether or not an FGC will have a positive outcome (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). Moreover, Slater et al. (2015) recently found that facilitators "were unanimous in underscoring the preparatory aspect of their work as a significant and often under-appreciated variable, vital to the success of subsequent conference phases and enhancing positive outcomes: (p. 629). Meredith described the facilitator in these initial aspects of his or her role as being the "initiator of the process." She believes that "without the facilitators, the family members and friends would never get together on their own." While facilitators did talk about these initial conference preparations, all of their focus was on what happens during the actual conference.

Up until the conference, all the preparation facilitators do helps set the tone for

the entire conference. Once the conference begins, it is up to the facilitator to maintain that tone and help manage the dynamics in the room. This helps to create a safe space and encourages conversation. It helps keep the conference moving forward. Gene believes the facilitator role is essential for this very reason.

> I have seen cases where I don't think people would have been able to figure out what to do next if we hadn't been able to help them think through a logical plan that they could follow to meet their needs and achieve the goals that they needed to achieve. I think we help them there, and I think we also help by in the group discussion, in several ways, I think we help create a safe environment where ideas can be expressed and people can talk. You know how families are. Well, we all know how families are. You all get together at Thanksgiving. You know what Aunt Mary's going to say. You know when she says that, Joe over here, how he's going to respond and how people are going to get angry and it's like a broken record just over and over and over and over again. I think we can help fix that during the time of the discussion, and I've seen some really good discussions that I believe the family was having, I'm not sure I'd say right for the first time, but I think they are having a good discussion which they normally wouldn't. (Gene)

Other facilitators echoed this sentiment of creating a safe space for the participants. They are there to get families talking. They pay attention to details in order to manage dynamics in the room. They strive to ask the right questions in order to help the families start the planning process on their own. "I'm someone to say, 'Really? Talk about that a little more,' or "what would you do if that happened?' Someone to drive it, so I guess in that sense you have to be listening enough to pick up on what people are expressing that no one else seems to be hearing," clarifies Mae.

In the interviews, facilitators worked to illustrate the balance of keeping the conference moving and productive but also making sure to give the family control. Ella considers this a key principle for the FGC process. She explains, "The facilitator lets the family lead, but also can kind of lead where [he or she] knows the family might need a little extra boost. That's the art of Family Group Conference facilitating, I think." This is

an essential yet delicate part of the facilitator's role that the facilitators expressed at

length. Dolores goes into further detail: "[The facilitator role is] to support, help them

keep things rolling, keep things going. The decisions are theirs and so my role is to help

them get down to the end of that path of getting those decisions made but never to tell

them what those decisions are." Sonya describes this balance as providing an "invisible

framework." The facilitator provides that "framework so you're there just enough to

guide them through that process but to not really leave an imprint of your personality or

your dynamic on them."

One last facet of the facilitator role discussed by facilitators concerned the various

uncertainties that clients and families experience throughout the FGC process and how

facilitators help reduce those uncertainties. All of the facilitators agreed that clients and

families come into the FGC program experiencing many uncertainties. When asked why

clients face this uncertainty, Delores explained that

> They [experience uncertainty] because of where they're coming in from. You
> know, many of them have already had negative experiences. So, the fact that they
> have this group and even that they're giving names of people that they can invite
> to be a part of the group… they've got to be unsettled with that. What is this
> group going to do? What is the purpose? How is this going to help me? Am I
> going to have to jump through somebody else's hoops? And then for families who
> often are sometimes resistant or hesitant because that parent in the group may
> have had failures in the past. Many times those families are like "I don't want to
> do this anymore. What do you want from me?" (Delores)

The recognition of clients' negative experiences as a factor in their uncertainty is noted in

literature. Frost, Abram, and Burgess (2014) explain, "If the family members have had a

previous disempowering experience… then they are likely to question why a FGC would

be any different and why people will take notice of their ideas and plan" (p. 486). For

facilitators to recognize where the clients and families are coming from when they enter

the program shows they put a great deal of thought into making sure the process works for the families. In addition to these uncertainties, facilitators say that clients are worried that it will become a negative session where other participants will "bash on them." They are uncertain what they should or should not say based on who is in the room. Mae even says that clients and families do not know how to be empowered and take charge:

> I think one of the uncertainties is the process. It's a process that really works to empower them. I always felt like people had told them what they were going to do or what they could and couldn't do but, no one had said, 'You have the power. You can do this, you have the power, you have the support system. You have what you need.' I would say one of the things would be the fact that they didn't know how to take that over at first because someone had always just told them. Finally they were getting to make decisions themselves. I think that's one of the uncertainties that they brought to it. (Mae)

Facilitators primarily used communication skills to help reduce the uncertainty of their participants. William asserted that in order to help reduce the uncertainties of clients and families it is necessary to "really understand the program yourself and having an understanding of what it can do for them." Ella insists that this takes place from the beginning:

> In the pre-meetings, talking to them about what to expect, why it's important, what others have gotten out of it. I always try to tell families that, from my experience, people leave the conference having a positive experience. I try to tell them that to set the tone for them to expect to have a positive experience. I am realistic, too. I tell them, "There are going to be things that come up that you may not like and my job is to facilitate that. To keep it on track." I try to prepare them. I think that's what's so important, is to tell them what it's going to look like and what they can expect and what they can get from it. (Ella)

Facilitators also used their communication skills to reassure clients of their protective role during the conference. This was meant to reduce the uncertainty that the client would become a target for others to complain about and insult during the conference. Norah takes this part of her role very seriously and manages that uncertainty through her

communication and facilitation skills before and during the FGC.

> I try to sit down with the clients and explain to them this is not a place for people to bash on you or to say negative things about you necessarily. It's a place for you to come together with your family. If that starts happening, I'm going to cut it off anyways because this isn't supposed to be a negative experience. This is an opportunity for you to get some of those things out on the table, for your family members to get some of those things out on the table, and then talk about some ways that we can fix them. (Norah)

It was obvious that facilitators put a great deal of pressure on themselves to embody that facilitator role and what they think a facilitator should be. Next, facilitators describe what they deem the most important skills and personality traits for an FGC facilitator to possess.

Ideal FGC Facilitator Skills and Personality Traits. While facilitators were very detailed in their opinions of the most important skills and personality traits for an FGC facilitator, their descriptions basically came down to an individual who is a good person with great communication skills. For these facilitators, it seemed to be more important that someone is in the program for the right reasons and is a genuinely caring and compassionate person than any of the communication and facilitation skills needed for the role. Mary explains why this is the case:

> Well I think that people can tell if you care or not. I think that people can read other people, and the majority of languages or communication is nonverbal. People can tell when you are there if you look them in the eye and you are smiling and friendly, you know. If you are trying to be upbeat or you walk in grumpy and, "Okay, I've got to do this, I'm tired, but I would rather go home." People can tell, and I think you've got to be invested in it to make a difference. (Mary)

Mary's explanation shows understanding of an important trait for facilitators. According to Hunter (2009), facilitators have to be present during the facilitation in order to be affective. Being mindful is something that participants recognize in a facilitator. It also

brings comfort to participants who will begin to develop trust for a facilitator that is

genuine. William expressed this similarly to Mary:

> In the first five minutes people are going to decide whether they trust you or not
> and there's all kinds of body language, all kinds of things that communicate to
> them "Oh wow, this person cares about what I'm going through. This person is
> really trying to help me." You just watch people relax. I think that's such a key to
> effective mediation or effective family group conferencing. You've got to get that
> trust early on. If you don't get it early on it's really hard to get it later. At the
> same time you don't get that trust by trying to get trust. You actually get that trust
> by being trustworthy. (William)

All facilitators expressed the importance of such personality traits. They talked about

how a facilitator needs to be authentic and able to connect with others. They should be

honest, friendly, and respectful. It was interesting to see such passion about this topic,

especially when they were talking about a role in which the majority of them had been.

Communication skills were brought up often, though with less passion than the

personality traits. This showed a great deal of respect and concern for the clients and

families that the facilitators work with in the FGC program. Facilitators still believed it

was necessary to have great communication skills in order to clearly articulate the

program and its purpose to the participants. They should be able to reflect and reframe

what is being said in the conferences in order to help manage the family dynamics. This

type of adequate, direct, and frequent communication is a value in FGC according to

Connelly (2006b). Ella addresses this in her description of what skills and personality

traits a facilitator should possess:

> Flexible, empathic, someone who listens and reflects, someone who gives the
> benefit of the doubt, someone who has the best interest of the client and their
> family in mind. Someone who's not rushed. Who lets the process happen and lets
> the family lead where they need it to go and then knows when to lead in the
> direction that it needs to go. Someone who's aware, brings up issues and tries to
> meet all that needs to be addressed to bring it up. Somebody who's fun, positive,
> has a good sense of humor. You've got to have some good people skills. (Ella)

Finally, facilitators talked about the importance of being aware of feelings and personal stereotypes. According to Long et al. (2004), this awareness helps facilitators abide by FGC principles and have an understanding of how their actions can affect participants and group dynamics. Paul and Dunlop (2014) assert that facilitators must be aware of beliefs and how past experiences have shaped expectations because they can heavily influence how others experience the conference. These are aspects of someone's personality that can affect the conference in negative ways if the facilitator is not aware. Being unaware of such things can put the neutrality of the facilitator and his or her biases in danger. Mae touches on this in her description:

> I think you have to leave your stereotypes at the door. You have to leave your idea of what life is supposed to be like and how families are supposed to be. You have to leave that at the door. You have to keep an open mind to what you're hearing and seeing and you have to maintain a positive attitude and you have to care about people in general. You have to be a good listener and you have to be able to … When you hear something that makes the hair on the back of your neck stand up, you have to be able to let that go at least long enough to maintain a fair and open mind at the conference. I think a good listener, not afraid of emotions, open minded, understanding your own as much as we can our own stereotypes and ideas about life and how people who don't have those same as our views on life. Accepting them for their views I think that's it. I don't care whether you're paid or a volunteer, you should be able to do that. If you can't do that, I don't think you have any business in the room. (Mae)

Mae concluded her statement with an opinion that the majority of the facilitators interviewed hold – these skills should be the same whether an FGC facilitator is a volunteer or a professional. Some elaborated that the professionals would need to try to be more personable or work harder to convey that they want to be at the conference and believe in the program. Slater et al.'s (2015) interviews with professional facilitators support the statements that volunteer and professionals should possess the same skills. They also believed that individuals who facilitate should have "strong organizational and

relationship-building abilities" as well as have the personality traits of being passionate and "taking a hopeful approach (p.633). In next section facilitators will discuss further their perceptions on being a volunteer FGC facilitator versus being a professional FGC facilitator.

Volunteer FGC Facilitators' Perceptions of Their Role as Volunteers

Many of the facilitators expressed surprise when they were told that using volunteers to facilitate FGCs is not a common practice. Some of the facilitators even had a difficult time envisioning how a professional FGC facilitator would work. Regardless, they each gave opinions on the pros and cons of being a volunteer facilitator versus being a professional. One concern with this research question was that volunteers would be biased towards their roles and against those of a professional. That concern turned out to be unfounded. These facilitators discussed equally the benefits and challenges of using volunteers in this role.

Perceived Benefits of Using Volunteer FGC Facilitators and Perceived Challenges of Using Professional FGC Facilitators. The number one reason volunteer FGC facilitators believe their role is beneficial to the process is because being a volunteer shows the client and family that they participate in this program because they care. Mary thinks that being a volunteer tells families that "I'm not getting paid to be here. I'm here because I want to be because I want to help." As for a professional facilitator, she can see how "if you do it for a long time and you are getting paid to do it, you could get insensitive to the situation. It's a job. 'I get paid whether they work it out or not' kind of thing." Meredith also agrees that being a volunteer seems to be meaningful to families:

I think one of the big things is when we tell the families that we're volunteers, I think that speaks very loudly to the families. I know sometimes the families would comment on that. They just assume that you're doing it as a job. They just assume that you're doing it for money. When you tell them "I'm actually a volunteer," that speaks volumes to them because they're like "Well, why are you here when you could be doing something else? Why are you here on your free time? Why are you doing this for no money?" I think it shows "Well, I'm doing this because I care and because I want to be here and I have a passion about this and I'm invested in this." So I think that's a really strong advantage to it in what that says to the families. (Meredith)

Volunteer facilitators recognized that professionals also facilitate FGCs with good intentions but may have to try harder to show they are invested in the clients and believe in the value of the FGC process. Interviewees speculated that professional FGC facilitators may have more of a struggle establishing the type of credibility and trust that volunteers have solely based on status. Norah explains this struggle:

I think the biggest benefit is as soon as clients and families realize that you're not there as a professional, you can't judge them. You're really there just to help them. You're there to facilitate the process and that's genuinely what you're there for. You're not there to tell them what to do, decide what's right or wrong. Even if you're a professional, you might not come in with that intent, but just because of the fact that you're in that field. You're an expert in that area. You get that hat placed on you whether you like it or not. (Norah)

By showing they care and genuinely want to help, volunteer facilitators believe families become more relaxed in their presence. This can foster openness that makes for a more productive and meaningful FGC. Cora suggests that volunteers are more "client-friendly" because they appear to be "one of them." Barnsdale and Walker (2007) show that these perceptions by the volunteers are shared by others. While they do not specifically talk about volunteers, they do point out that independent facilitators are looked upon more favorably and tend to produce more successful conferences. Sonya, who has experience in the social work field, expresses that it can be the opposite for professionals:

52

I think the con [for professionals] is that it tends to become an us-against-them type of system. Ideally, I think most people start out wanting to work with the families and support them. Maybe not so much in substance abuse case management, but when you're looking at other facilities that have more power like Children's Division or Juvenile Justice or anything like that. It's very much an us-against-them and tends to be really jaded. I think for one, families feel that jadedness because you tend to start lumping then all together making general assumptions. I think that you're automatically part of the other team, then, so you're automatically against them if there's a conflict and you lose that perceived neutrality or what's supposed to be there. (Sonya)

This sense of jadedness that Sonya talks about was the main issue that volunteer facilitators brought up when discussing the challenges associated with using professional facilitators in the FGC process. Interviewees felt that professionals were much more likely to experience burnout, become desensitized, treat the process mechanically, and to get "stuck in a box." Research shows that these concerns are valid. In their survey, Nixon et al. (2005) discovered that professionals that facilitate do so in additional to other job duties. This adds more stress in the mix and can adversely affect the conference. Additionally, in interviews with professional FGC facilitators, Connolly (2006a) found that those facilitators did experience stress, burnout, discomfort, frustration, and tension. According to Norah,

Because they wear that hat all the time you get stuck in this box of what to do. You might not come up with some of the things that we come up with in Family Group Conferences like... Dancing with the Stars was part of our plan once. "Tuesday nights at 7:00, I'm going to watch dancing with the stars by myself." That's not something you typically see in a professional plan, but that was something that that client needed in order to relax and self-care... You have this wide plane of possibility of what can happen. You're more open to whatever is there versus being confined to your professional hat and things like that. Different professionals are better at separating those roles, but if you're there as a social worker you might not get the same results. (Norah)

Interviewees also brought up the obvious financial benefit that using volunteer facilitators has for an organization offering Family Group Conferencing. Gene imagines

that it "may not be a viable program if you have to use professionals." William agrees

that volunteers make for a more sustainable program: "Can you make a program self-

sustaining if you just try to pay everybody? That's one big issue and it's a very big

issue." However, he does advocate for a mix of both volunteers and professionals in the

FGC program. In his opinion, the "quality of the program is in danger of being below the

standards you want if you don't have some kind of minimum of professionals who can

set the example and set that pace." Additionally, he believes that it would be ideal for a

program to eventually have seasoned volunteers to act as mentors to new volunteers.

Facilitators pointed out that not being an expert could be either a benefit or a

disadvantage depending on the family and client in each conference. Lack of expertise

was something seen as a good thing because it amplified the fact that they were

volunteers with no ties to the outside agencies. Their job is to focus on facilitating the

conference. It could also be perceived negatively and may affect how credible the clients

and family would view the facilitator. Being an expert was also viewed as something that

could be a benefit or a disadvantage for a professional facilitator. On one hand, the family

may feel like they will be taken care of because the professional is experienced, but on

the other hand, a family may not trust the authority that being a professional brings.

Perceived Challenges of Using Volunteer FGC Facilitators and Perceived

Benefits of Using Professional FGC Facilitators. As mentioned before, there was

concern that the interviewees would lean more toward discussing the benefits of using

volunteer FGC facilitators and the challenges of using professional FGC facilitators. On

the contrary, these volunteer facilitators had plenty to say about the challenges of using

volunteer facilitators and the perceived benefits of using professional facilitators. The

major concern for using volunteers in general was that it is difficult for organizations to manage programs with volunteers. Gene summed up this concern nicely:

> I think from the program [perspective] you don't have the control over volunteers that you have over professionals. I think you might have to even accept that the proficiency of the facilitators might be less than it would be if you had professionals. You have a lot more work to keep your volunteer force organized and find people to do that. They're a lot less reliable because the priority may not be as high as it would be for somebody that's paid to be doing it. It's more a difficult program to manage with volunteers. (Gene)

Another reason being a volunteer can be so challenging stems from the time commitment that is usually needed for this type of program. Some volunteers admitted that working with the FGC program is a lot of work for volunteers, particularly in the initial preparation of calling family members to inform that about FGC and making sure the FGC has a time and a place that works for everyone.

> You're asking a volunteer to do quite a bit to pull that together because it sounds easy "well, I'll just call these people and tell them we're having a meeting." But there's a lot more finesse to it than that. I think also it can get very time consuming trying to pull it together and you're asking a volunteer to do this and you make the call and you don't get anybody. (William)

Mae felt strongly about this point as well:

> It's very time consuming. When you try and assemble 12 or 15 people, even 5 people, it's challenging. It's challenging to find a place to do it, challenging to get everyone together. If you have conference calls that are coming in that people that are in different states that want to participate, it's very challenging and I think a lot to ask for of a volunteer, a lot to ask. (Mae)

Volunteers believe that all of the above challenges would not be as much of an issue for professional FGC facilitators. They have dedicated time for FGCs because it is their job, they have more experience and a higher level of expertise because this is something they work with regularly, and they are easier to manage in an organizational setting.

One last benefit of using professionals is that it would be easier to keep the same two facilitators on an FGC case from beginning to end. With volunteers, it is not always possible to keep the same facilitators on a case from the beginning due to scheduling conflicts and time commitments. Many times, one facilitator will take the lead and stay with the program from the beginning. The co-facilitator that steps in may not have even met or talked to the client prior to the actual conference, much less made any contact with family members. For volunteers like Dolores, this is the perfect arrangement for her busy schedule. Her career as a counselor has her working in multiple cities, so having the flexibility of stepping in as support when needed is important to her. For other volunteers like Gene and Meredith, missing out on building rapport with clients and families from the beginning can affect the trust the family feels towards them and the dynamics of the conference. When Meredith is not able to participate from the beginning she feels useless as a facilitator because she has not built that rapport. The client and family then direct their attention to the other facilitator that they know. "Those were the times where I felt like my presence was useless. So those were the times that were frustrating and discouraging, because my co-facilitator had met the family, had talked to the family… even talked on the phone where I didn't. There were times when I showed up and would be like 'What's the client's name?'"

Although there are many challenges with using volunteers as FGC facilitators, those volunteers still feel positively about the program and think it is worthwhile. The next section focuses more on why these volunteers became involved with the Family Group Conferencing program. They will also discuss what kept them motivated throughout their time in the program or what still keeps them motivated to work with the

program.

The Motivations of Volunteer FGC Facilitators

Studies show that volunteers have different motivations surrounding their work. Clary et al. (1998) proposed six motivations that individuals have for volunteering: values, understanding, career, social, protective, and enhancement. In this study, the motivation of values stood out above all others. Other motivations were evident, but were not discussed nearly as much as the motivation of value. With volunteerism, individuals have the opportunity to express their values relating to concern for others. Understanding refers to the opportunity that volunteerism offers to experience new things, gain knowledge, and practice skills and abilities. This is also related to the career motivation where volunteerism provides a way to gain or maintain career-related skills. The social motivation for volunteering refers to participating in opportunities with the concern for relationships with others. This could mean one is volunteering to be with friends or for the favorable status it may bring in the eyes of others. The protective function of volunteering has to do with an individual's ego. This could help reduce one's guilt for being more fortunate and also to make an individual feel more positive about his or herself. Lastly, the enhancement function of volunteering is related to the protective function in that it uses volunteerism to enhance an individual's mood in a more positive way. This person volunteers in order to maintain or enhance a positive affect.

Examining why individuals are involved in a program and what they expect from it can give a great deal of insight into their experiences. Understanding what keeps them involved in the program provides even more context into those experiences. Furthermore,

it can help organizations understand what volunteers are looking for in a program. The majority of FGC research has focused on the clients and families. While discussing the importance of the facilitator role, Ella declared that "the facilitator is part of the process. The Family Group Conference, it wouldn't be a conference without all the pieces there." Such a statement frames the facilitator as a vital piece of the FGC system. This section focuses on FGC facilitators, specifically volunteer facilitators, and their reasons for getting involved with the program, what keeps them volunteering, and what impact the program has had on them. Because some of the interviewees are no longer active volunteers with the program for various reasons, they discussed the motivations that kept them volunteering while they were still active.

Initial Involvement. Interviewees became involved with the FGC program for a variety of reasons. Four of the facilitators used their internship, practicum, or graduate assistantship as an opportunity to become involved in the program. This illustrates the motivations of understanding and career. These individuals are using the program as a way to gain experience in their field. Meredith specifically searched for "restorative justice programs" online and found the local program for her practicum. The rest are community volunteers that became involved while looking for opportunities in alternative dispute resolution. Some had prior experience working with programs at the Center for Dispute Resolution and helped get the FGC program started.

The initial motivations for these individuals all came down to the desire to help other people. This is clearly the motivation of value, which was the dominant motivation expressed in all of the interviews. Cora was looking for ways to make a difference in the lives of others while William was attracted to the idea of empowering families. Dolores

deeply believes that as a counselor, she is "here to help the overall community and that to me means families." Krista was specifically interested in the opportunity to help individuals struggling with substance abuse: "I was excited to do some volunteer work with the community, particularly because I knew that there were significant issues with drug abuse and that created a lot of the issues with crime in this area. So I thought that would be a really great way to get into it."

All of the interviewees were satisfied with the training they received prior to participation. They believed they were prepared for an FGC as much as you could be without actually being involved in one. William explained that after the training,

> I pretty much understood what I need to accomplish. Understanding what the objective was to begin with, I thought they did a good job in the training to do two things: First, to show us where we were trying to end up and then secondly, teach us the process by which we were trying to get there. So that it wasn't just purely mechanical… that we understood where we were trying to go with what we were doing. (William)

It was interesting to hear the different expectations all the facilitators had once they attended training. Some of the facilitators remember the video of an FGC process they watched and that is what shaped their expectations. Mary saw a lot of family dynamics to manage and was worried about how she would react in that situation. Gene thought the dynamics presented in the video were interesting and reminded him of the skills needed for mediation. Mae remembered very negative emotions from the training video so was surprised to encounter very positive emotions in her first FGC.

Other expectations had to do with the program's value for the family and client. Krista believed the program could be transformative for the client and she affirms this expectation was met: "In both of the conferences that I've attended it seemed to be a positive experience and I thought that was really inspiring, too, to see these people who

had pulled themselves out of a really dark place." Meredith began the program looking

for life-transforming experiences, but became more realistic as she was more involved in

the program:

> I think when you first think of FGC and you start to think of it, you can really get idealistic with it. So "Oh, this is going to be life-transforming for every member in there," but early on I think I shattered the idea that every single FGC was going to be life-transforming, it was going to be perfect. So then on out, it wasn't really discouraging, because I almost had more of a realistic interpretation of it, versus this idealistic "I'm going in there and I'm going to transform their lives," versus "I'm going to go in there and what can I do to better the situation," versus "Let me change your entire life." (Meredith)

William also had to be more realistic about the empowerment aspect of the program: "I

want to be able to look at that person's eyes and realize that they've actually been helped

along their life journey. I think this program really does that… Although, it's still the

realism of the fact that there's only so much you can do in that brief amount of time."

Once volunteers became more involved in the FGC process, their motivations for

working with the program began to evolve based on their experiences. The next section

will address this further.

Motivations to Continue Volunteering. When asked what keeps them involved

in the program or what kept them involved while they were still active, volunteers once

again expressed the desire to help others. As they were facilitating FGCs, they would feel

more energized and motivated when they would actually experience success in another

person's life. This was also a motivation for professional facilitators in New Zealand.

Connolly (2006a) found that one reason facilitators continued working in the facilitator

role was that they experienced satisfaction when they were able to help families come

together and create a solution. This was the outcome for Sonya who stated that it was

motivating when she was a part of "FGCs that just had that immediate sense of

gratification for me because you saw the change by the end of the meeting." Similarly, William explained that, " I had a number of times where I genuinely felt the lights went on with the group and they began to see some hope begin to be built in the heart that 'maybe we can do this.' It always motivates you when you begin to see people revitalized with their hope and expectation and willing to give that another try." He was always motivated to help clients and families in the program, but his greatest motivation was knowing he was indirectly helping the children involved. "If I can help mom and dad get on track some then that translates into making life a lot better for the children."

Meredith especially enjoyed getting to know people and their stories. It made it particularly motivating when she would see the progress in these individuals' lives after she established relationships beforehand.

> I really enjoyed the client interaction. Getting to know the different stories, I think, was probably one of my favorite things. Just getting to know the different stories and seeing even at that point, even at the conference, seeing the progress that they already had, knowing that there was going to be more progress, I think was probably the coolest part of it. (Meredith)

Gene also said his motivations stem from making connections in his life. He appreciates this about the Family Group Conferencing program and views it as a reconciliation activity to help him live out a fundamental aspect of his faith.

> One of the things actually is my faith. I'm Mennonite background… One of the things in the theology is the idea that one of the most important missions that we can have and taught by Christ is the mission of reconciliation. That's why you will find most Mennonites are pacifists, nonviolent, really advocate that and they see a lot of what Christ taught, the idea of loving your neighbor. Reconciliation is the word that I like to use for that. I've always been keen in my life being able to do things that fit into that category, reconciliation. Being able to have good conversation with people. Being able to care for, respect for. The idea is love and care for your neighbor, always wanting the best for them, no matter what… That's certainly a big, big driver. (Gene)

While working with clients and families, volunteer facilitators are motivated by

61

seeing that the program is helping others and by the connections they make with the FGC participants, including other facilitators. Outside of the FGCs, volunteers find the support they receive from the program's organization to be motivating as well. Volunteers like that they have people to talk to about the program and any of their concerns. The feel listened to and reassured when they are feeling uncertain. They also appreciate the trainings they receive which give them the confidence they need to facilitate FGCs. Dolores is motivated to work with the program because she is offered opportunities other organizations may not be able to due to her hectic schedule. "I think that they do a pretty good job. Because of my schedule, I'm not someone that would need to have someone contacting me on a weekly basis. That would just be way too much and I probably would pull back from that because I'd think 'I don't have the time.' But they do stay in contact and they're there as a resource if there's questions, concerns."

As facilitators gain motivation by witnessing the impacts FGC has on clients and families, they are also being impacted by their experiences in the program. Such impact has a motivating effect on these volunteer facilitators as well.

Program Impact on Volunteer Facilitators. The two common themes when discussing how the FGC program has impacted each facilitator were that it was an eye-opening experience for them and the awareness of their privileges. These two themes really go hand-in-hand. Working with individuals with more difficult struggles and life experiences can amplify the privileges one has in his or her life. This caused many facilitators to acknowledge the easier aspects of their lives when talking about what the clients face in theirs. Such awareness may also create another motivation for the facilitators to continue working with the program. Clary et al. (1998) describes this type

of motivation as the protective function of volunteering. It helps make others feel better

about the privileges in their lives because they are choosing to "pay it forward" by

helping others. Krista talks about how the FGC program has impacted her in this way:

> Maybe I'll sound terrible saying this, but I've had a very fortunate life and I grew up in a middle class community in the middle of cornfields and all of my friends were honor roll and goody two shoes like me and we didn't really get into trouble. And so, it's certainly opened my eyes to how these people are good people and they just made some really terrible choices and now they're living with the consequences of that. So, I mean I always kind of understood that and knew that, but it's really powerful to see that in front of you… that these people are really trying hard to make their lives work and so I think that that's something that I'm really grateful for. I'm always going to see that. (Krista)

This has helped facilitators appreciate what the families and clients they work with have

gone through. It has helped facilitators understand the perspectives of these individuals.

Mae echoes this point:

> I'm a lucky person. I live a comfortable life. It's very easy when you are in that situation not to see or experience any other kind of life. In that sense the Family Group Conferencing really expanded my world view and allowed me to see what challenges these families were facing every day and it's easy to forget those when you're lucky enough to have a comfortable life. (Mae)

> By being an "eye-opening" program, FGC has helped reduce prejudices in

facilitators. It has helped changed their attitudes toward other people and has helped them

see the good in others. Many facilitators say they are now more understanding of others.

According to Gene:

> I've never been exposed to people that, I'll just say, whose lives have been utterly wrecked by drug abuse and that's been a big eye opener to me to see that. I think it's reduced my prejudices because I've been very fortunate in my life not having, I wouldn't say born with a silver spoon, but grew up in an environment where you perform, you perform, you perform, and seeing that's something that's quite different, and getting to know people in that environment is great. That's made a difference for me in attitude. (Gene)

Norah has also learned to be more accepting as a result of her involvement in this

program: "I think it opened my eyes a little bit to the different families. Everybody has their strengths and their weaknesses and you just work on both of them together and take people for who they are." These are valuable experiences and life lessons for these facilitators. They are in the program to help others but are gaining so much from the program in return. "Honestly, I get as much out of it as any of the people that I am volunteering to help," recognizes Mae. Sonya is certain that her experience in this program will continue to affect how she approaches her career in social work and treats the people she encounters. "Being able to just step back from and not attach all these judgments to people we have no idea [about] because that is a really easy thing to do… that will have a huge impact on my career probably for the rest of my career." Because she had so much experience in the field of social work prior to her involvement with the FGC program, Sonya had to go through a paradigm shift to become an effective facilitator that abides by the principles of FGC. She describes how she went from a position of control over families to being in the position of putting them in control. Rauktis et al. (2010) stress the importance of this type of paradigm shift. While it is a difficult shift in the beginning, it is necessary to make sure the power balance is altered to the families.

The final presentation of volunteer FGC facilitator experiences in this research question will focus on actual Family Group Conferences that stand out as positive experiences to facilitators. Facilitators find such positive and inspiring conferences to be especially motivational for continuing in the program. The section will conclude with a brief discussion on the positive emotions that facilitators experience including a great concern for the clients they work with in the program.

Positive FGC Experiences. As each facilitator would remember those FGCs that were their favorites or that stood out as especially positive, three common descriptions began to form. Each of their stories had one or more of these elements: the FGC was made up of very supportive participants, it began intensely but was productive with a positive ending, and/or family members that had not talked to the client in a long time showed up to the meeting and relationships began to be rebuilt. Moreover, it seemed like when there was a larger turnout for the FGC it was more likely to be considered successful.

Cora remembered an FGC where the support group was a large one and everyone brought food. For her, this FGC was successful because of "the interest that the family put into it. I think that's the secret right there." One of the largest FGCs for Sonya turned out to also be a very positive one for her. The family was ready and willing to help the clients and needed the clients to accept that. "They just stood up and were talking to the couple like, kind of just this desperate plea like, we want to help you. We believe in you guys." She believes this plea got through to the client and made for a "beautiful" FGC. When Dolores thought of her most positive FGC experience, she also remembered a very supportive group for the client. Although she discusses her work to keep the conference on track, she contributes the success of the FGC to the great group of people surrounding the client. Mae facilitated a conference where the clients' family members lived farther away. One of the client's bosses and his wife stepped in as a support team for the couple. "Here was this man who had this business and his wife who were sitting at this table for this couple that they hadn't known very long. They were willing to make sure their kids

65

got what they needed… I thought 'boy, that's going above and beyond.' … That was very satisfying and encouraging to see."

When Ella remembered her most successful conference, she recalled a tense situation with a couple on the verge of divorce. "That conference sticks out to me because it got really heated." She worked hard to manage their conversation by making sure each person was able to speak and feel heard. She smiled as she talked about the communication breakthroughs in the conference. For once, it seemed, the husband and wife were hearing each other. "They walked in wanting a divorce and they left the conference deciding to work on their relationship in a healthy way by getting counseling. I'm getting chills as I'm telling it because that felt really good." For Norah, her successful FGC that began intensely was due to a defensive client. Despite the family's attempts to discuss concerns in a productive manner, the client was not handling the situation well. Norah had to stop the conference and talk with the client privately to assess whether the conference could go on. "Mentally, I was prepared at that point to leave and not do an FGC because she was crying and getting very emotional and not receiving anything well. After we talked she said, 'No, I'm here. I want to do this today.' After that, we came up with a really great plan. Seeing that transition was really cool." Norah believes her flexibility in that situation helped make that transition from unproductive to productive. Pulling a client aside to talk to them privately was something she had not done before, but felt she needed to do it in order to help this conference move forward.

Gene also had a very intense conference where the family seemed to be divided into factions. He could feel an air of hostility in the room. The facilitators encouraged the

family to talk and he remembered the point when "suddenly the family started catching onto what to do and began working together. One guy, this guy that had been fed up, he took over the role of taking the notes and everybody liked that. People participated like you wouldn't believe they participated." He believes one reason it was successful was because he and his co-facilitator did not try to "push the process." It turned out to be a very long conference, but the facilitators and family members were patient and let the conference take its course. He also notes that the participants "took responsibility for this being their meeting rather than 'Okay, we're doing this because you want us to do it.'" The FGC ended with a detailed plan that everyone felt good about.

For Krista, seeing a family member show up that no one thought would be there was a powerful experience for her. "There had clearly been a lot of problems with that relationship over years and years. I thought it was amazing that they were in the same room and just him showing up showed so much support for this person and they both acknowledged that. To me that was incredible." Norah talked about another conference she facilitated where the client had a strained relationship with her father. They had not seen each other in a couple of years and the client was nervous to invite him. Norah let everyone know that she wanted them to be comfortable and they were not required to do anything. It was up to them if they wished to speak or participate in any way. The father did choose to attend the conference. "They talked for the first time face-to-face and that was just a really neat experience… That bridge wasn't built during the FGC, but there was some foundation laid on working towards that relationship." She believes it is important for a facilitator to be genuine, honest, and respectful, especially when managing such fragile family dynamics.

Sonya's favorite FGC combines all of the elements of the above stories. This was a conference with a large turnout where the client hadn't seen most of her family in over a year.   Although the family members did not begin the conference as a supportive group, they finished the conference as one. It was a very intense conference for Sonya and remained intense until the end. They put together a great plan and family members invited the client, who they had not seen in months, out to dinner. Sonya witnessed a family being rebuilt.

> I want to say there were maybe eight people there when this girl didn't think anyone would come. Most of them told me no they weren't coming, so I had to do a lot of work on the front end to get people around the table. But then she ended up having a lot of people show up. They all show up and they are anti- this client and they all want to talk about how horrible she is and how she's just going to let them down again and were really vocal about it…There was a lot of conflict that really needed to be managed. They spent a long time on their plan… I know that people got up and walked out angry a few times and then came back. It was really emotionally charged. That client hadn't spoken with her family for ... It was quite a while. I want to say even a year. Then the family themselves hadn't spoken for months because there were all these riffs… Part of their plan was to begin to have family dinners together once a month like they used to do and maintain communication better. Then when I was locking up the building when we were leaving, the mom and sister who were so angry at this other daughter … they invited her out to dinner with them and they all walked off going out to dinner. That was probably one of my first really immediate successes where you see the change and I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is awesome." (Sonya)

While discussing these great FGC experiences that stand out to them, facilitators brought up many positive emotions. It was easy for facilitators to discuss the negative emotions they experience during conferences, but it seemed like whenever they caught themselves talking negatively they quickly began to point out the positive emotions they also felt. Hope, satisfaction, sympathy, empathy, joy, optimism, accomplishment, and excitement were all discussed. They all also tied into the success of the conference and, in particular, the client. Schuler and Sypher (2000) argue that emotion labor does not

have to be a negative aspect of the job. They claim "the performance of emotional labor is also intrinsically connected with the best and most rewarding parts of the job" (p. 52). This demonstrates that the emotion work associated with FGC facilitation can be a rewarding aspect of the position.

While empathy and sympathy do not have the same level of positive feeling that joy and optimism do, they are being categorized as positive because they have to do with working to understand the client and their struggles. William experiences positive emotions with the client and families when they are successful. "When you see people that do show up and they really make the effort and you see them begin to really work together towards solving the problem then you feel the joy. You get to share in their joy and their hope and optimism." Ella also shares in the positivity when the FGC is beneficial. "There's also the satisfaction you feel when you feel like the family really had a good conference. It's a positive experience. I feel like I did a good job. There's that satisfaction." For Mae, witnessing others come together in support of another is a "very satisfying and encouraging thing to see."

One thing that really stood out was the amount of concern these facilitators have for their clients. So many times, they would describe life from the point of view of the client. They take the time to understand the struggles the clients have gone through so they can understand why they may have made the decisions they did. Research by Barnsdale and Walker (2007) makes this finding especially stand out. They stress the importance of having FGC facilitators that can strongly empathize with others. Sonya discusses what it can be like for a client to attend an FGC:

> I think that it takes a lot of courage for them to come here and to be vulnerable with people who are done with them. Occasionally we would get family members

69

that are supportive… but I think for somebody to come here and have a whole roomful of people talking about what they think their strengths and needs are. I think that would be scary for any of us. I think it serves us well as facilitators to remember that… They don't have the coping skills which is why they have substance abuse issues and so that's something that they've been working on, but I imagine that's a pretty scary experience for them… They already are attacking themselves. It's part of the reason they have substance abuse issues because they don't know how to love themselves and give themselves grace. That's really scary. I'd be scared. (Sonya)

Gene talks about understanding why a client has made the poor choices that put him in the position he was in:

The poor guy that we were working with had reached the bottom. When you don't have the kids, you don't have any financial support, you're way in debt, it's like a time when you don't know what to do, and that to me is such a dangerous time because often the only good thing that can happen to somebody that feels that way is "Well I'll just have some more drugs and the pain will go away." (Gene)

William even discusses the point of view a family may have which would lead them to choosing not to be involved in an FGC:

You don't know how many times these people have tried to help the person and the person let them down… You may be handed a case where this person has not burned all those bridges and you're able to rally a pretty good group around them because they have at least shown in the past that they will try. Then you might get handed another case where the person is just jilted everyone to the point where you can hardly get anybody to step in. (William)

The first research question focused on the ways that volunteer FGC facilitators understand the FGC program and their role within it as well as the ways in which volunteer facilitators experience the program. This led to discussions on how volunteers perceive their role as compared to professional facilitators, what keeps facilitators motivated, and the different positive emotions they experience. While there were hints of challenges that facilitators face throughout this chapter, the next chapter will present and discuss in-depth the challenges volunteer facilitators face and the ways in which those challenges are managed.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The second research question focuses on the greatest challenges that volunteer facilitators manage within their role in the FGC program. These challenges involve the FGC process, working with families, and interfacing with professionals among others. In many cases, these challenges are what cause volunteers to lose motivation or question their involvement in the program.

General Challenges Volunteer FGC Facilitators Face

Volunteer facilitators face inherent challenges in the Family Group Conferencing process and also in working with people in general. Managing family dynamics, the facilitator role, and time constraints were discussed in different ways by the interviewees. Another challenge that was focused on in these interviews was the interactions between volunteer facilitators and other professionals involved with the clients, mainly the clients' advocates.

Up until the FGC begins, facilitators face challenges in making the conference happen. An unmotivated client presents a difficult challenge because he or she does little to help organize and schedule the conference. Facilitators can struggle getting the client to name people to invite as supports. This was especially discouraging for Cora. "With the families, some of them were so disinterested of even gathering together. You couldn't get them to say they would come… They weren't interested enough to even call anybody and that's disheartening. They're not interested enough in the welfare of their own child to even try and that's sad." Calling family members and trying to get them to attend the

conference can be a challenge. It is even more so a challenge when family members agree to attend the FGC and then do not show up. The most disappointing FGCs for facilitators were those where many of the family members did not show up. Aside from working with the client and family, another challenge prior to the FGC is trying to schedule conferences between two volunteer facilitators. This could lead to last minute assignments where facilitators do not fully understand what is going on with that particular FGC. It makes it challenging for them to co-facilitate.

Within the conference, many aspects of the facilitator role were seen as challenging. Volunteers found managing family dynamics, keeping participants focused, and knowing when to intervene or how much to participate to be particularly challenging. Barnsdale and Walker (2007) acknowledge that there is a great deal of responsibility placed on the role of the facilitator. The quality of a facilitator's skills affects the success of the conference. Such a reliance on the facilitators places a great burden on their shoulders. For Gene, knowing when to lead and when to let the family lead can be a difficult balance. "Sometimes the group will interact so much you're almost in the way. They almost don't want you participating. Sometimes they're sitting there and you can't drag something out of people because they feel you should be leading that." Managing family dynamics is a challenge facilitators discuss in many regards. One difficult type of family dynamic for Norah takes place when the support group for the client is low-functioning and depends more on the client than the client does on them. That struggle is always tough for Norah to watch and help manage.

> I have had a couple where they have a lot to work on, but they have it together more than everybody else. It's really hard because the family can't really support them and even if they say they do, you can tell with the dynamics of the family that that client is the one that's going to have to head everything. It's just amazing

to know how much these clients are doing outside of what we expect like taking care of families and parents and other kids. I still think it's useful, but then it's one of those things that I don't know if it's going to be a long-term benefit to them because they're going to end up being the one doing everything and still heading all that in the long run. (Nora)

She also noted that many times in families where the client is the support person for everyone else, it can sadly be difficult to get family members around the table when that person needs support.

Managing Challenges. In order to continue facilitating in a healthy way, volunteer facilitators have to find ways to manage these challenges for themselves as well as for the families. This helps make the conference productive and beneficial for those involved. Communication in general is most often deemed an effective tool in managing most types of challenges. Talking with the client and family members before and during the FGC to discuss the purpose of the program and what is expected from them can help deter certain negative behaviors. Research shows that this type of communication is extremely valuable and effective in working with families (Connolly, 2006b; Frost et al., 2014). When family members are not going to make it to the FGC, Norah uses communication to urge them to keep in contact with the client because they really need that support. "We might reschedule or have them write a letter or something like that so that their presence is still there or just call in for a second or I encourage them to talk to the client after the conference to see how it went. Yeah, that's sometimes difficult." Facilitators use communication to stress to clients the amount of time needed to complete the FGC. This helps preempt any difficulties in finalizing the plan in the third phase of the conference. Additionally, facilitators use communication in the form of self-talk to remind themselves that each family is different and cannot all be treated in the same

manner. The conference must be tailored to each family. "I think with everyone going in and understanding that each family's unique in the way that they are interacting with each other and each case is going to be unique and different. More of being aware and present to that family in that particular time," clarified Sonya.

The most utilized form of communication to help manage challenges and any other experiences in the conferences was having discussions with a co-facilitator. Co-facilitation was brought up over and over again throughout the interviews. While there were challenges within co-facilitation itself, particularly in the dynamics between the two co-facilitators, most agreed that having a co-facilitator was very important for them. Cora explained that having a co-facilitator made conferences work better for her. "There were two of us and we decided together which one of us was going to do what. We decided ahead of time before we met with our families… so everything went really smooth… It takes two people… With both knowing what to do and how to do it to make it go seamlessly." For Ella, it is vital to have someone to lean on to manage any challenges. Facilitators can learn from each other and help manage challenges together so that burden does not fall on one person. Another challenge that must be managed is the many negative emotions that facilitators experience and must manage in order to be effective in their role.

Negative Emotions Facilitators Experience. Facilitation can be challenging and emotionally charged work. Facilitators to be aware of their emotions and understand how to handle them productively. On top of the many responsibilities related to the facilitator role, Connolly (2006a) shows that FGC facilitators have a variety of emotions related to their position that they must manage. Emotion communicates information by helping

individuals and those around them understand their perspectives. The idea of managing these emotions is consistent with Hochschild's (2012) theory of emotional labor. She defines emotion management as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p. 7). Thornton and Novak (2010) distinguish between emotional labor, something with an exchange value, and emotional work, something that has use value.

Family Group Conferencing is known as an emotional experience and talking with volunteer FGC facilitators confirms that. "We're dealing with people. There's a lot of emotions," proclaims Ella. Facilitators discussed many emotional experiences, but did not have much to say when directly asked about the emotions they experience working with the FGC program. As facilitators, they are supposed to be able to have awareness of and control over their emotions while facilitating. When directly asked about emotions, many facilitators chose to talk about how they use boundaries to distance themselves from emotions. Norah explains that "as a facilitator I try to be as objective as possible. During the actual FGC, I don't necessarily get too emotional about anything because it's not my role to go there. I am more there to facilitate. If I'm emotional, it makes it hard for me to do that role." Facilitators do experience emotions, however, and they revealed those through storytelling.

The most common negative emotion that facilitators discussed in their interviews was feeling frustrated. This frustration was due to scheduling difficulties, unexpected time constraints, family members not showing up to the conference, participants being disrespectful, facilitators feeling like they wasted their time, and the stresses of working with professionals. Ella rescheduled an important commitment so she could set up a pre-

meeting with a client that lived out of town. When Ella showed up for the pre-meeting the client was not at home. "That was really frustrating because here I went out of my way to do all this and the client just blew it off." Gene co-facilitated a conference where most of the family members who confirmed they would attend the conference did not show up. It was frustrating to try and work with a couple of people who had little motivation to get things done. He believes they never looked at that plan again. "I just felt like we wasted our time."

Other negative emotions that facilitators experienced were heartbreak, feeling disheartened, cynicism, discouragement, sadness, hopelessness, and generally feeling negative toward others. Many of these emotions had to do with the motivation level of the client, the attitude of any professionals involved, and feeling upset by the clients' struggles and experiences. Cora felt disheartened when she struggled to get clients to make a list of people to invite to their conferences. Gene sometimes feels cynical about the amount of difference he can really make in the FGC program because "I've seen so many times people work so hard to try to change their life and then just fall back so quickly into old habits. Meredith sees the struggles of the clients and their children and describes it as "heartbreaking."

> I know that, in general, the societal view sometimes on individuals who are going through treatment is kind of negative, but then you start to learn about all of these things that they're dealing with and all of these things that they're struggling with. Maybe it's lack of support. Maybe it's housing. Maybe it's transportation, and then you start to realize that there's all of these barriers, it's really quite heartbreaking. When you see their children too it's really heartbreaking, but it gives you a better appreciation and better understanding and I think that is good for wanting to do something about it and wanting to have programs like this, programs that are in place that are going to try to move them out of that. (Meredith)

As facilitators have demonstrated, Family Group Conferencing is a program full of

emotions that are both negative and positive. It can be mentally, physically, and emotionally draining to work in such conditions. It is vital for facilitators to find ways to manage these emotions so they do not experience burnout and exhaustion.

Managing Emotions. Volunteer facilitators manage their emotions in very similar ways to how they manage their uncertainties. As with uncertainty management, facilitators rely heavily on communication with co-facilitators and program support staff to share feelings, seek reassurance, and vent frustrations. They also used self-talk to organize their thoughts and explore those feelings. Mae discusses using these management strategies to work through the many emotions she experienced as a volunteer FGC facilitator:

> Usually I feel [emotions] afterwards. I don't feel them at the time. I don't like to cry when the other people are crying. I feel those later on my way home when I'm debriefing myself or with my co-facilitator, we're talking about it. That's when I manage those kinds of things in myself. Whether it's anger or frustration or a feeling of "bluebirds and happiness, this may work!" I guess I've gone from feeling just really good leaving and thinking, "oh-my-gosh this was wonderful! I am so happy! I feel we've succeeded. I feel this person has a chance. I saw support" to the "who the heck made this rule?"… I managed those either if I'm doing it by myself, which is rare, with myself on the way home or with my co-facilitator. (Mae)

Like Mae, Gene utilizes self-talk and communication with his co-facilitators to deal with the emotions he experiences. Sharing those emotions helps lessen the burden of those emotions for him.

> First of all, in the meeting what I remind myself is no value judgments. We're not concerned about how somebody got here. What we're concerned about is this is a situation and we're going to put together a plan to move forward from this… One of the best things I like to do, if it's a long distance away, is have a good talk with a co-facilitator on the way back… We talk about all kinds of stuff, not just debriefing, but then we get into stuff. I really enjoy those visits because by the time we get back to town… I'm feeling a lot better. (Gene)

> Further management strategies facilitators use to handle emotions involve being

in control of those emotions and knowing their place in the conference. Norah believes that being emotional gets in the way of facilitating so she does her best to stay neutral. "As a facilitator, I try to be as objective as possible. During the actual FGC, I don't get too emotional about anything because it's not my role to go there. I am more there to facilitate. If I'm emotional, it makes it hard for me to do that role." William focuses on doing his best and making the conference all about the client so that emotions cannot hinder his work.

> I think the biggest strategy is not trying to perform. At the most basic level, it's not about me, it's not about how well I performed. It's about "can I help you?" When you really get that settled in your heart then things don't upset you at the same level… I really try to be as competent as I can, as compassionate as I can, as concerned about them as I can and to invest what I can in the timeframe I have and I have to leave the results with them and God. (William)

Ella feels strongly about giving others the "benefit of the doubt." By trying to understand where someone is coming from, it helps her manage negative emotions she feels when she assumes someone else's intentions. "How do I handle all of this? Self-talk is important. Being realistic is very important. Not assuming the worst, like when I get pre-meetings canceled because of whatever happened to the client. Giving the benefit of the doubt… That's what I had to do in that situation, otherwise I would have been stewing in my frustration."

Due to the nature of their role, facilitators often find themselves managing emotions for others as well. Two approaches to managing emotions for others were discussed in the interviews: letting the emotions play out and not reacting in order to bring emotions down. Mae considers emotions during conferences natural and does not try to get in the way of those.

> I'm not afraid of emotions and I think emotions have to be dealt with. Any emotion that happened around that table didn't surprise me. I wasn't afraid of it. I think a lot of facilitators are afraid of the emotions. I would just let those emotions play out. If someone was crying because they were overwhelmed that they had the support that they didn't realize they had, that was natural to me. I didn't discourage any of that. (Mae)

Sonya trained herself to speak quieter and calmer to manage negative emotions that were not helping the conference. This lack of reaction to the negativity is a tool to diffuse the situation.

> I'm not really a reactor. I don't have a problem not reacting. Usually, my reaction is to somewhat shut down, especially when I'm in a professional situation. That's something that I've been training myself to do for a while… If somebody's getting really heated and raising their voice… I just start to get more and more flat and monotone… I tend to go in the other direction to bring it all down. (Sonya)

Sonya seems to practice "emotive dissonance," a term coined by Hochschild (2012) in her research on emotion labor. This refers to the façade that must be put on when an individual's true feelings conflict with what needs to be presented. Olson (2009) asserts that by using such communication skills a facilitator can establish trust with a family that may help the facilitator manage any hostility that surfaces.

One of the greatest challenges for facilitators that creates feelings of discouragement and frustration is negotiating their role through tensions with professionals. The next section presents what it is like for volunteer FGC facilitators to work with system professionals.

Collaborating With System Professionals

A challenge for volunteer FGC facilitators that typically takes place outside of the actual conference is the interactions and tensions with professionals such as advocates or caseworkers. In a system where facilitators are expected to be translators between the

components of the system (referral agency and families, for example), this can be especially problematic. Trying to understand his or her place in the system as well and understand the system itself produces quite a few uncertainties for the facilitator. Navigating tensions with professionals compounds the uncertainties and challenges that facilitators already face while working within the system.

The most common tension discussed by facilitators is the perception that the advocates who refer clients to the program do not actually believe in the value of the program. This tension can make it difficult for facilitators to sway client opinion and motivation for the program if the professional they work with often does not convey a positive vibe concerning the program. When asked if she felt any tensions when working with professionals, Meredith began emphatically nodding her head in agreement before the question was finished being asked.

> Sometimes I just feel like there is a different perspective on the whole FGC process… A lot of the professionals sometimes had the same attitude as the client of "This is something else I've got to do." That makes it hard, one, to get in touch with them to get them to communicate with you about the client and about trying to get things set up. So communicating through that is a big deal. Then, it's difficult, two, when as a volunteer you're trying to portray this message of the FGC and you're trying to really set a tone for the whole FGC, but it's difficult when maybe you have the professionals who feel the same way as the clients and are working with them on a day-to-day basis. (Meredith)

William warns that apathetic advocates are just as harmful to the program as if they were against it. "I never experienced anybody that I felt was against it, but even just being apathetic towards it makes it hard to succeed. You really need them advocating for what we're doing as well as advocating for the client."

When working with advocates or trying to communicate with them in person, by phone, or through email, many volunteers feel as if the professionals do not take them

seriously or view them as credible. Nixon et al. (2005) confirm that professionals may

question the credibility of volunteer facilitators. This is because they are critical of the

volunteer's lack of knowledge or experience in the field that they work in on a daily

basis. Ella has felt this way a number of times: "I think that people that are professionals

like the advocates… I know I have felt before that they don't think I'm credible. That I

don't know what I'm doing. I don't work in this field. There's those feelings." Sonya

talked at length about the perceptions of the professionals. Having worked in the social

work field for many years, she knew these skeptical attitudes toward facilitator credibility

came down to the amount of work experience the professionals have in the field. Sonya

calls this "street cred" and says that she can tell a difference in attitude from the

advocates who know her background and those who do not.

> There's almost like a street cred that you kind of have to work in... Because it's
> hard. I mean honestly I'd never want to work in substance abuse. That's a hard
> field. Children's Division, hard work and you're dealing with a lot of crap. There's
> a kind of a perception of "you don't have any clue what these people are like.
> What these families are like. You don't know what you're doing. You're naïve."
> All of this kind of stuff. Really, that tends to come more from they're burnt out
> and they're jaded. It's not because they're bad people. You do get screwed over in
> the field, so it's a lot easier just to start building up those defenses for you
> personally, so that you're not hurt. I know for me, when I began to work with
> some of the case workers over there, I could tell that there wasn't the same level
> of respect as the ones that knew that I had been working in this field for a long
> time or the ones that I was in class with and so they knew who I was. You could
> totally tell the difference and I think it's just because there's this sense like you
> don't have any idea what you're doing, so there's not a lot of credibility there and
> there's not a lot of trust. (Sonya)

An interesting take on working with professionals came from Norah who

discussed working with pastors that attend FGCs. These are individuals who are viewed

in a professional manner by the other participants. This can have an impact on how the

participants interact with that person and on whether or not they are comfortable to

disagree with that person.

> I guess the more challenging experience is when [the professionals] are not sitting back. I see this a lot when pastors come, not to go against the pastors in general, but their belief in the religious aspect of the plan and how that's going to play in the role. I just try to make sure I constantly ask the client "Is this what you want in your life? Is this something that's going to help you with that?" Definitely, with religion it comes into that, because their role is to promote that. If the client's all for it, then I'm like, "Yes. Let's put it in the plan." I like to check with the client on that because sometimes you don't want them signing up for things they don't necessarily want to sign up for or are not ready for. It's the same with family members that are like that, but sometimes with that professional role, I think people have a harder time standing up to that and saying, "Well, maybe that's not what I need," because they're an expert and so kind of balancing those roles a little bit. (Norah)

Norah's story illustrates the importance of balancing the power in a conference between

the clients and their families as well as any other person that can be seen as an authority

figure. This is the challenge of working with professionals of any type.

Volunteer FGC facilitators have to navigate many challenges while working

within the FGC system. Such challenges are accompanied by an array of uncertainties

and emotions. It the next discussion, volunteer facilitators talk about their experiences

with these feelings.

Ways FGC Facilitators Experience and Manage Uncertainty

Family Group Conferencing is a multifaceted process wrought with uncertainty

and emotions. This can be especially burdensome and draining to a volunteer facilitator.

Interviewees spent a lot of time discussing the uncertainties and emotions they have

experienced during their time as volunteer FGC facilitators. It is interesting to note that

while facilitators spoke at length about these topics, they did so through storytelling and

not with direct questioning. When asked directly what emotions or uncertainties they had experienced, many facilitators claimed they were pretty sure of themselves or not a very emotional person and may have listed one or two points without going into much detail. However, uncertainty and emotion came up often in the interviews when it was not asked as a direct question and that discussion would be much more detailed.

Uncertainty is experienced by volunteer facilitators throughout their time in the program. It is fascinating to hear about the evolution of uncertainty that most facilitators talk about in a similar fashion. Early in their experiences, facilitators were more uncertain about process-oriented concerns and also insecurities about their performance. Uncertainties would evolve into more relational ones concerning the clients and family members as well as those dynamics, which are different for each conference. Uncertainty reduction theory labels this type of uncertainty as predictive which refers to the expectation a facilitator has about another person's behavior (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011b). Once facilitators gain experience in the program, they have worked with enough families to develop a certain expectation about the types of behaviors they may encounter. One uncertainty that spans the experience of facilitators is that of whether or not they are working in a successful program. While they do believe there is value in the program, they are not sure of its success rate and have a desire to understand that.

Early Uncertainties. Scholars have found that uncertainty is highest when employees first enter an organization (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Scott & Meyers, 2010). One of the major uncertainties facilitators experience early on is the uncertainty of being able to manage their role as a facilitator. This includes managing a large group of individuals, being able to protect the client, going through the process correctly, and being able to

help the clients make their plan concrete and detailed. When Ella first began facilitating, she focused intently on the process and all of her uncertainties revolved around her ability to manage that process. "At first, it was like 'Am I saying the right thing? Am I doing the right thing? … 'Oh my God, they've listed all the strengths, now I've got to get to the concerns! How do I break this up? How do I do this?" Mary was worried about her ability to protect the client in a large group of people. "I felt like I wouldn't be enough to protect someone from that many people if they were all upset. I felt like instead of it being a lot of people there to support, it could so easily be a lot of people there to point fingers and question, and tear them down. I just wasn't sure I could do a good job." Meredith's greatest uncertainties revolved around communicating effectively with the participants. She was afraid of saying the wrong things and hurting the conference.

> I think my biggest uncertainty or biggest struggle was probably almost this fear of not knowing how to respond to the family. Or not knowing what to do with the information that the family was saying. This fear that it wasn't going to be as helpful for the family as I wanted it to be. I knew what I was supposed to be doing, but then I had this fear that if something were to come up in the Family Group Conference, I wasn't going to know how to handle it, and I wasn't going to know how to get the family through that and get it to be a more productive conference for them. I think it was just this overall "They're not going to have a good conference." (Meredith)

Other uncertainties that volunteer facilitators experienced early in their involvement were related to personal insecurities. Krista feared clients would not be able to relate to her and therefore, not trust her with their conference. She felt her different or more positive life experiences would be sensed by the clients and alienate her.

> I feel like in order to make [the FGC] process work that facilitators need to be approachable, you know, you can't be stuffy. This was honestly one of my fears is I've had a really great life and I come from a family who has always loved me and always supported me. I haven't been through the kinds of experiences these people have. So I was fearful that they would not trust me and not relate to me because I think it's pretty clear that I've been very fortunate in my life. (Krista)

84

Facilitators have a common concern about their competency level when they first begin to facilitate. They have a fear of failure and worry about making mistakes, which relates back to the burden facilitators have for making a conference successful based on their skills (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007). "I'm a glass half full girl, but this is a glass half empty situation. Because I'm afraid it could get messed up pretty easily," disclosed Mary, whose fear of failure led to her decision to not get involved with the program after training. "Words can do so much damage so quickly. If that happened and somebody didn't do well because I couldn't control the situation, I don't know that I could deal with that." Ella also experienced personal insecurities in the beginning. "I wasn't sure that I would be taken seriously and if I was competent enough to work with the families. I was nervous."

Additional Uncertainties. Scott and Meyers (2010) studied the organizational assimilation process and found that employees experience uncertainty throughout their time in an organization. While facilitators still experience some of the initial uncertainties on a minor level from time to time, they say that their uncertainties have evolved into more interpersonal ones where they are unsure of what family dynamics will look like in each of their conferences and how they will interact with the client throughout the process. They also develop more complex uncertainties about the program in general such as how to balance the time they have with the time it takes to truly empower another person, what goes on in the system outside of the FGC program, and how successful is this program in which they have dedicated hours of their time.

Now that Norah has facilitated several FGCs, she only experiences uncertainties once she begins to develop a relationship with her client and his or her family.

Honestly, it's more just family-based and I don't really have any uncertainties until I get to know the family and then that's when concerns come up and things like that based on whatever that family is. I've done enough at this point to know that every single family is different. Every Family Group Conference is different, even though it has the same process. The concerns and difficulties for each of those is going to be different with each family so really it's just very specific to the family and what they've got going on. (Norah)

Mae's uncertainties also take place once she begins working with a new client and family. "Every time… it seems like you're walking into it fresh again because everyone is so different. Each family or each set of people, they are very different. You think you know what to expect and you think you know what to do, but it is really based on what's happening in the room." Meredith's uncertainties revolve around how helpful the conference is to the client, especially when the lack of motivation is obvious, and whether or not he or she will follow through with the plan created.

There were times too where I'd almost feel discouraged because maybe it was a good plan, but then you start to think "Are they actually going to do anything of what we just said? That's great if we can just sit down and do that, but is that actually going to be followed through with?" There were moments where it was kind of discouraging like "I don't know if they seemed like they could write it down on paper? I don't know if they're motivated to do it, though?" (Meredith)

William, a professional mediator whose experience allowed him less initial uncertainties than many other volunteer FGC facilitators, never knows how much time it will take to make sure a client is genuinely empowered. He believes it takes a great deal of time and effort to make a person feel empowered who is not used to it.

I think there's still that lingering concern of "how can I set this up in the brief time that I have to invest in this in a way that the family really takes it from there and it actually goes to fruition?" … It's amazing how much you CAN do, but you're also limited. It's kind of unrealistic to think you're going to totally turn somebody's life around in four hours. That's what I always want to do because I'm an idealist and anything I do I'm really looking for transformation in people's lives. (William)

Gene's uncertainty lies with the system that Family Group Conferencing operates within.

As illustrated in the ecosystems perspective, FGC is a system made up of several interacting components. Gene knows he is a part of that system, but has no idea how the system works. He understands that clients work with outside agencies that refer them to the program, but that is the extent of his knowledge. "I don't understand the system very well. I don't know what they've been talking [about] with their advocates. I don't know what the law is. I don't know what they have to do." What happens within the overall system can affect the dynamics and the attitude of the client within the FGC. It may even affect the outcome of the FGC and the general success of the program.

Many interviewees either directly brought up or hinted at their uncertainty of not knowing the effectiveness or the success rate of the FGC program. Krista wanted to say for sure that the program was transforming for clients. While she did say it was a positive experience for her she added that "it's hard to tell because on the back end I don't know how well that they've adhered to the plan." Norah finds herself wondering what has happened with her past clients and if the conference was beneficial for them. "You don't know what happens to the plan afterwards or the families for that matter. Maybe getting some feedback there… Even if it's just 'This family completed the program. They're doing well.' … Just have some closure like "Did this actually help you? I felt like it helped you, but it's your experience not mine.'" Gene spent the most time discussing this uncertainty. It was clearly a huge uncertainty for him that he struggles with, especially when trying to communicate the program's value to others.

> I would love to know [what happens to the clients]. People that I talk to that casually talk about the Family Group Conference, overwhelmingly the response is "That's not going to work. That's not going to work. You're just not going to change people. What's your success rate?" I don't know what the success rate is, but there is a lot of pessimism, at least casually the people I've talked to about, whether this program's really going to make a difference. (Gene)

He believes it would be more motivating for him to know this information.

Managing Uncertainty. Volunteer facilitators managed their uncertainties in similar ways. Self-talk, talking with co-facilitators and support staff, information-sharing, and being more observant were the ways that uncertainties were managed. They leaned heavily on communication in order to cope with the many discomforts they faced. This finding supports research that shows both employees (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Nelson & Quick, 1991) and volunteers (Kramer et al., 2013) manage uncertainty through communication with peers and supervisors.

When facilitators used self-talk and reflection to manage uncertainties, in a sense they were giving themselves pep talks to feel more positive about what was happening. Gene tells himself "that's not my area" to let himself know he can facilitate without knowing information about every aspect of the program. William facilitates in a way so that he can tell himself "I did everything I could" no matter the outcome of the conference. While watching another facilitator in action, Ella told herself "I can do this. I think I can do this." Observation is also a way for facilitators to manage their uncertainties, especially those dealing with managing their role and the process. "I'm just watching, thinking about how or what I would do or how I would respond to that. It was a great opportunity for me to be able to troubleshoot those things and be like, 'okay, if this happens again this is how I would probably try to handle it.'"

When managing uncertainty with clients and family dynamics, Norah likes to be prepared by talking more in-depth about family dynamics with the client beforehand. She also is more observant during the conference to pick up on any red flags.

> I think the biggest thing is just try to prepare the best as I can. I try to ask those questions like "Do you have any concerns?" and talk to the family members and get a feel of where they're at and just what they're coming in with, because we don't get a lot of information. So, the more that I know helps, but I try not to get too stuck in the details. Then I think the biggest thing during the FGC is just staying in the room and watching for the non-verbals and all those other things that we don't necessarily say, but are there. And acknowledging those because those help a lot. If I have a sense of where those are at then I can have a better sense of, "Okay, maybe I have to include this family member a little bit more." (Norah)

Norah's comments demonstrate how she relies on good facilitation skills to manage her uncertainty. Long et al. (2004) describes a skilled facilitator as someone who is able to pick up on non-verbal communication and then use that observation to incorporate careful questions to encourage unspoken thoughts and concerns.

The most common discussion on managing uncertainty had to do with talking to and processing with others. It was helpful for facilitators to simply talk about their uncertainties or to hear from others with experience. "I talked with the co-facilitators a lot because I shared that uncertainty with them," explains Meredith. Ella also views talking with co-facilitators as a useful way to manage uncertainty. "I lean on my co-facilitator. That helps me to gain another perspective… I think having a co-facilitator is so important." Experiencing and managing uncertainties can be demanding for a volunteer facilitator. On top of those experiences, facilitators are also dealing with various emotions that they must also manage. Such experiences can cause facilitators to lose motivation to volunteer with the program. The next section discusses in more detail the experiences that cause volunteer facilitators to lose motivation.

Reasons Volunteer FGC Facilitators Lose Motivation

Facilitators had various reasons for loss of motivation to volunteer in the FGC

program. From the volunteer aspect, facilitators cited time constraints as a barrier to

volunteering their time due to the time-consuming nature of getting an FGC organized.

Additionally, lack of consistent work was discussed as a factor in losing motivation. This

affected Gene's motivation to volunteer as often.

> If a volunteer facilitator is somebody like me that is retired, we figure out that we
> want to spend so many hours a week doing something that's volunteer work.
> We've got a lot of opportunities to do that. When you are a volunteer facilitator,
> the workload for us is very uncertain. We may get called to do a job or to
> facilitate, and then we may not hear anything for a week or two weeks. That
> makes it a little bit hard for us. I know in my case… I started looking for
> something, what I call a little more regular volunteer work. (Gene)

Other volunteer facilitators like Sonya, who worked at the Center for Dispute Resolution

regularly as a student, also believe that it is more difficult to stay motivated to volunteer

with the program when you are not consistently facilitating FGCs. While this was a

motivation for Dolores because of her busy schedule, it seemed to be more of a

demotivating factor for the other interviewees.

Challenges with the program would also cause facilitators to question their

involvement. It was disheartening for Norah to see clients enter the program that were not

ready for it. It was even harder to be a part of an FGC where a family is not helpful to the

client.

> It's hard to be doing FGCs when the families are struggling, sometimes just as
> much or more than the client and to go in a room and we're here to help the client,
> but realize even the client who has all this stuff that they still need to work on on
> their own. They're still the person in the family that's helping everybody else.
> Sometimes, those are hard because they're still on their own, but then their family
> … They just don't have a lot of family support even though they have family.
> (Norah)

Facilitators found it discouraging when the advocates in the partnering agency were

apathetic to the program. They did not seem to believe in the value of FGC like the

facilitators and that is something that clients notice. That can make it difficult for a

facilitator to do his or her job. William talks about his experience:

> Probably the biggest challenge was… it seemed like the caseworkers, the advocate I guess, didn't really understand the role of the family group conference facilitator or the program even. That in some cases they did not seem to understand how it could help them do their job. I think sometimes they almost viewed it as "here's one more thing I've got to do" and they are very overworked. My heart went out to almost every advocate that I worked with. I saw that those people were just putting in the hours, unreal. I don't know how you're doing it now but, in theory we began that the advocate would come to the family group conference and be a part of that. What we found was in most cases the advocate did not want to invest that evening in that. We were able in most cases to get them on the phone but it was really kind of happening during their time off from work theoretically. I wouldn't say they were trying to undermine it by any means but it just wasn't much of a priority to them and I think they may have even felt like it was some duplication of what they were doing. (William)

As William pointed out, this is a different type of work for professionals which may

explain the presence of apathy. They must now work around the families schedules which

may include evenings and weekends. Frost et al. (2014) recognized that "professionals

are asked to make allowances for the timing of the conferences and to accommodate

them. This causes difficulties with professionals who are often working long hours and

unable to take time back. (p. 486). Moreover, the move to focus more on the plan for the

agency made Sonya believe everyone would lose focus on what was more important in

FGCs:

> I think the only really frustrating thing is, and this is kind of an overall thing in social work, is that we're putting so much pressure on these plans. Because the movement in social work and for billing and for insurance and for all of these other things is that there has to be something viable that comes out of it and it has to be measurable... And they're all good but when we start making that the focus I think it loses the effect of what really is the shining star, which is what I would call it, part of the FGC, which is the family dynamics coming together having the conversation. (Sonya)

It is equally difficult for a facilitator to keep motivation when the client is

apathetic as well. "When a client doesn't want it, it's hard for me to want it for them. I do

want it for them, but it's hard to see that," maintains Ella. Meredith agrees:

> Probably those less-successful conferences where you know the client isn't
> motivated and the conference almost seems more of a burden to them than
> anything. You start to question "Why are we doing this because it's just another
> appointment they have to go to?" There were conferences we literally rescheduled
> like five different times. Then you're like "I don't know if this is even helpful at
> this point." I think those ones were less successful. There were conferences too
> where we would come together and you don't feel like much got done. No one
> really talks and the plan that was established was mediocre. Those less-successful
> ones that just kind of leave you feeling like "I don't know if that was helpful or
> not?" (Meredith)

Sometimes this is not the client's fault, but can be attributed to impossible requirements

the agency requires for the client's plan. This was extremely frustrating for Mae and

resulted in her leaving her volunteer position.

> I haven't done one for a long time. The reason that I haven't is because the very
> last one that I was participating in was just such a logistically just almost
> impossible. It was very frustrating. It was then that I really experienced a lack of
> cooperation or communication with the outside agencies that we had to work
> with. It ended my involvement. It was sad but it did. It was so frustrating that I
> just couldn't make myself do it again. (Mae)

Negative FGC experiences can cause a facilitator to question his or her

involvement in the program. It can be very discouraging to leave an FGC believing it was

unsuccessful. Facilitators discussed negative FGC experiences that stand out to them and

agreed that these are a cause for loss of motivation to continue facilitating. The FGC

experiences that stood out as negative to interviewees had various reasons for being

disappointing. There were a couple of reasons that kept coming up like low turnout or

time constraints. Other reasons had to do with clients that were not a good fit for the

program or family members that ruined the conference with their negativity. As

facilitators talk about these experiences, they also discuss what they would do differently now if that had the conference to do all over again.

Gene experienced a conference where there were seven people confirmed to show up but only two people, the client and her brother, showed up. He and his co-facilitator went ahead with the conference and the entire time it was a struggle. Gene ended up feeling as if nothing was truly accomplished.

> They really struggled to put together a plan. They did. We almost ended up writing it for them, I mean putting the details in for them. I don't think there was a chance in the world that they were going to carry that plan out, was my feeling. This was just a case where there was not the right kind of support group there… If we had known that people weren't going to show up, we probably would have canceled it and said, "No, let's wait and do it again." Maybe we should have thought about whether we should redo it when they had more people there… I just felt like we'd all wasted our time, but maybe I'm wrong. (Gene)

William had a similar experience where he facilitated a conference with the client and one other person. Because of the low turnout, he felt like not much was accomplished. However, he did take the opportunity to try to motivate the client to not give up. Sonya's experience with low turnout was one that she felt ended up doing more harm to the client than good. It became something the client was only doing to check off her list of requirements.

> Literally all she had was one friend in whatever housing she was in, so she came with her. I think it almost shone a spotlight on how little resources she did have... It almost felt more painful. She probably shouldn't have been referred to the process because she just didn't have anybody. To have to try to help her think of people to invite, it just magnified the fact that she has nobody in her life right now. (Sonya)

If she had the conference to do over again, Sonya asserts that she would not have let that conference happen. According to her, the client should have never been referred to FGC in the first place.

Krista felt rushed in an FGC when the family indicated they were ready to leave before the plan was finalized. She was not aware of any other commitments that the family had made for after the FGC so she was unprepared once the family told her they needed to leave. It made her uncomfortable to try and rush through the last of the process. She felt like that was completely out of her control and was unsure whether they really had another time commitment or were tired of being in the conference. Ella said she has experienced being rushed by families many times and one particular FGC stands out to her. She remembers it because the family complained that their voices had not been heard in the conference.

> I remember reflecting back on that conference and what had happened is the family members were like, "We got to go. We got to get out of here" when we came back in to do the plan, to review it. As a facilitator, that puts so much pressure on you, because you want to make sure that you get the specific plan that is going to meet their needs, get everything they need out of this, but at the same time you want to respect what they're saying and what their needing… I remember, in that specific instance, I did not talk to the family members, I only checked in with the two clients. I think it was a husband and wife. I even remember turning my chair and looking at them... I just said, "This is what you want to do. Is this right?" Get to specifics. [The family members] were even off to the side chatting. (Ella)

Ella now makes sure to tell the client and family before and during the FGC that she is going to need at least 30 minutes after their private family time to go over the plan with them. From that experience, she now stresses the importance of making sure the conference fits everyone's schedules.

Family dynamics also impact the outcome of the conference. Sonya facilitated a conference where the client's mother spent the entire time berating and belittling her. The mother felt she had the right to do so because she was caring for her granddaughter who

94

had been taken away from the client. Sonya tried to manage this to her best ability, but

was thrown off guard by the level of hostility coming from the mother.

> It was so bad and I don't know that I managed that well enough for her. We
> managed through the initial part and it went okay. I know I had to redirect mom a
> few times but then by the time they were working on it together it just exploded
> and she bailed. She ran out crying. I got her to come back in just to simply
> solidify what they had done. It was rough and it didn't really go well. (Sonya)

This was early on in Sonya's experience as an FGC facilitator. If she had it to do over

again she would spend more time talking with the client and family ahead of time to get a

better feel for the dynamics. That way she could stress the purpose and expectations of

the conference more. She would also pay more attention during the initial phase of the

conference to better manage the dynamics from the beginning.

Mae's negative experience happened while trying to get an FGC organized. She

felt the agency that referred the client to the program was placing unrealistic expectations

on the client and were not communicating effectively. Trying to organize the conference

was a process that dragged on and on. The client never had a conference and eventually

Mae refused to take any more FGC cases.

> The woman involved had her children taken away because of alcohol abuse and
> she had lost her driver's license as well from the alcohol abuse. She lived honest
> and truly in the middle of nowhere, five miles from the closest town… She was
> very isolated. The outside agency that was involved had already developed some
> kind of plan for her. Things that she had to do to get her children back. The plan
> was impossible for her to do because she had no transportation… No one was
> helping her… It was impossible from the very smallest part which was her not
> being able to get any place to the bigger picture of her support system being so far
> away and unable to really get there. We finally thought well we'll just have it at
> her house. We couldn't even have conference calls because we couldn't get cell
> phone reception. It was just frustrating from the beginning to the end… We never
> completed the conference because of the actual getting everyone together and
> because it happened so many times with the outside agencies saying, "Okay it's
> going to be this week," and then it wasn't. That happened probably three or four
> times. Finally I just said I don't want to do this. (Mae)

The negative experiences are challenging for facilitators to manage. For some, it can be what causes hesitation in agreeing to the next conference.

Research question two explored the greatest challenges the volunteer FGC facilitators experience and how they manage those. This chapter gave a clearer view on the complexities of facilitating a Family Group Conference. The next chapter concludes this research with an overview of the findings which include strengths, limitations, and areas for future research.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

As shown in FGC literature and through this research, facilitators are a vital component of the Family Group Conferencing process. Scholars argue that the success of an FGC correlates with the skills and abilities of the facilitator (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Olson, 2009; Paul & Dunlop, 2014). With so much depending on the individuals who coordinate and facilitate these conferences, it is essential for the facilitator's perspectives and experiences to be incorporated into FGC literature. This study set out to examine the perspectives of volunteer FGC facilitators and to understand their experiences in the FGC program. The focus on volunteers in FGC is previously unstudied in the research and is important in understanding the viability and effectiveness of using volunteers in this setting. Through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 11 volunteer FGC facilitators, the present study gathered information on facilitators' experiences and understanding of the program as well as what volunteer facilitators identified as their greatest challenges throughout their involvement in the program.

Strengths and Limitations

A number of strengths have emerged from this research. First, this study contributes a perspective to the Family Group Conferencing system that has not been well-represented in literature. Bringing in the perspective of the FGC facilitator creates a greater and more complete understanding of the FGC process. Through these experiences, FGC practitioners can identify challenges within the FGC process and seek

out avenues to address those challenges for all involved in the process. This is a benefit for practitioners, facilitators, families, outside agencies, and even the community as a whole.

This study goes even further by contributing the perspective of volunteer FGC facilitators in a field where there is no consensus on whether or not it is best to use professional facilitators. This information is important for organizations looking for an alternative to paid professionals in a Family Group Conferencing program. One of the challenges of institutionalizing a process like FGC is the money required. While initial pilot efforts typically are funded through grants, these are limited and increasingly programs are looking for cost effective ways to incorporate FGC processes into their existing services. One of the major concerns with utilizing volunteers may be the competency level of a volunteer compared to a professional. From the volunteer perspective, there are benefits and challenges for both volunteers and professionals. Either way, there will be challenges that organizations would need to address based on the type of facilitators they are using.

This research illustrated that using volunteer facilitators in Family Group Conferencing can be a benefit to the process and to the participants involved. The volunteers in this study displayed a profound level of concern for clients and families as well as a strong belief that they are responsible for making sure the conference is a success. This was shown through their assertions that if they do not manage a conference well, it is their fault if the outcome is not successful. The volunteers also believed skills and personality traits that are important for FGC facilitators to possess should not be different depending on professional or volunteer status. This is supported by the

professional facilitators in Slater et al.'s (2015) research who listed similar skillsets and personality characteristics to those listed by the volunteers in this research. However, participants in this study believed they stand out from professionals because their presence as volunteers in FGCs seemed particularly meaningful to the families. They believe that working with families as a volunteer demonstrates that they are there for the sole purpose of helping the client and families because they care. Volunteers thought this may bring extra comfort to individuals who are used to working with professionals on a regular basis. Moreover, volunteers imagined professional facilitators would become jaded and desensitized from the challenges and emotional burden that working with families brings. Additionally, professionals carry heavier caseloads than volunteers and may have added duties for which they are responsible. Volunteers thought this would cause burnout and lead to a rushed process in an effort to keep up with the demands of the caseload. Because many of the interviewees highlight the relational aspect of building rapport and creating a connection with clients as a vital aspect of a successful conference, this burnout in professionals could be harmful to the success of the program and the clients.

Additional issues revealed and explored in this research include the experience and management of uncertainty, emotion, and general challenges. Volunteers revealed the presence of uncertainty throughout their involvement in the program, but especially when they first became involved. Uncertainties were related to unfamiliarity with the process and the fear of incompetency of the facilitator in the beginning and evolved to uncertainties with family dynamics and relations with the client once they were more experienced and confident in the process. This perspective contributes to and expands the

research on uncertainty and organizational assimilation. Research suggests that employees experience the highest uncertainty upon organizational encounter (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Scott & Meyers, 2010). Along with Kramer et al. (2013), whose research sought to contribute a volunteer perspective on the organizational assimilation process and uncertainty, this research supports the idea that individuals, whether employees or volunteers, experience the highest amount of uncertainty in the organizational assimilation process when they enter an organization. Furthermore, Scott and Meyers (2010) found that employees experience uncertainty throughout the assimilation process. This research supports that finding and expands it to include the volunteer perspective.

Volunteer FGC facilitators also experience Family Group Conferencing as an emotional and challenging process. While facilitators chose not to dwell on emotions too much because they believe their role is to be emotionally neutral, they brought up the emotion of frustration most often. This frustration is usually the result of the challenges they face within their role. The majority of the challenges revolve around managing family dynamics, working with unmotivated participants, and managing time constraints. Facilitators talked about the challenge of knowing when to intervene in family conversation and the difficulty of getting people to attend the conference and remain focused while there. In order to perform their role to the best of their ability and to cope with all the challenges, facilitators had to find ways to manage.

Although volunteers discussed a few ways in which they manage the challenges of their role, the results suggest that facilitators use communication above all other strategies. This takes place when facilitators are managing uncertainty for clients and families by addressing their concerns through clear communication. Moreover,

facilitators manage their own uncertainties, emotions, and challenges by seeking out social support from co-facilitators. This support consists of asking for advice, seeking validation, venting frustrations, and looking for connections in shared experiences. This information stresses the importance of communication skills in facilitators as well as the benefit of having co-facilitators assigned with each facilitator. Research on employee uncertainty suggests that organizational members find it most helpful to reduce uncertainty through communication with supervisors and peers (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Nelson & Quick, 1991). This study supports that finding and, like Kramer et al.'s (2013) study, expands it to include the volunteer perspective.

An additional finding of this research is the presence of tension between volunteer facilitators and professionals from the referring agencies. This tension causes facilitators to feel frustrated and discouraged and can lead to a loss of motivation to continue facilitating. Research hints that this is a tension that can exist whether or not the facilitator is a volunteer or a professional (Brady, 2006). By bringing this issue to light, FGC practitioners can seek out and address any tensions within their organizational partnerships. Acknowledging such tensions is the first step in addressing a problem that can and does negatively affect every aspect of the FGC process. Facilitators report that professional advocates seem apathetic to the program which results in a lack of communication and participation. They do not believe that the professionals see the value in the program and this attitude sometimes affects the clients' motivation to fully participate in the process. This can ultimately lead to an unsuccessful conference.

While this research produced a number of important findings, there are two significant limitations that are important to discuss. First, this research was conducted

within one FGC context and second, this research presents one perspective in volunteer-led FGCs. The volunteer FGC facilitators in this research present their experiences within the context of substance abuse recovery. As discussed in the research, the majority of FGCs are conducted in a child welfare setting (Nixon et al., 2005). Although the context for this setting has elements of child welfare (many times the client has had a child taken away or is in danger of this happening), the focus is on the recovery of the client. Experiences of volunteer FGC facilitators in other contexts may be different depending on the model and participants. This difference in experiences, which includes challenges, is important knowledge for FGC practitioners who operate in different contexts. There may also be a difference in skill sets and personality traits that are important for facilitators to possess.

The results of this research create an understanding of the ways that volunteer FGC facilitators experience volunteer-led FGCs. Additional perspectives were discussed within this research from the volunteer facilitator's point of view. This perspective reveals one of many sides of the experiences within a volunteer-led FGC process. Volunteer facilitators in this research imagined what their conferences and interactions were like from the client, family, and advocate perspectives. Though helpful in exploring the experiences of volunteer FGC facilitators, such speculation on its own limits the complete understanding of the total experience.

Future Directions

Several avenues for future research exist. The present study examined the experiences of volunteer FGC facilitators who work with clients recovering from

substance abuse. Further research should be conducted on the experiences of volunteer facilitators in additional FGC contexts in order to identify any differences in experiences and to create a more complete picture of FGC facilitator experiences. Whereas this research contributes the volunteer FGC facilitator's understanding of a volunteer-led FGC process, additional perspectives discussed during the interviews, such as the client and the advocate, merely speculate on the thoughts and experiences of those individuals who interact with the volunteer facilitator. Future research should include the perspective of participants who interact with the volunteer FGC facilitator. This information will establish a more complete understanding of the impact volunteer facilitators have on the FGC process and will provide better-quality data for practitioners to make informed decisions on the utilization of volunteer facilitators in the FGC process.

Furthermore, research needs to be conducted on ways to address facilitator challenges within the process as well as within the system. With the importance of the facilitator role being reiterated throughout the literature, research should begin to focus on the ways that FGC facilitators' experiences can be used to strengthen the FGC process to benefit all involved. In order to understand their impact on the outcome of the FGC process, further research should focus on the tensions between facilitators and system professionals. The research should include volunteer and professional facilitators and explore the cause of the tensions for each. The perspective of the system professional should also be included to develop a greater understanding of what causes these tensions and how they affect the process. Results of such research would help practitioners address tensions and allow for a better understanding of the impact of those tensions.

Final Thoughts

Interviewees described Family Group Conferencing as an "eye-opening" experience that causes them to reflect on the privileges in their lives. It is an experience that brings growth and acceptance. It creates connections and builds relationships. It is challenging and emotional. It is a process that has as much of an impact on the facilitators as it does the other participants. Through the voices of volunteer FGC facilitators, this research has highlighted the benefits and challenges of their experiences to reveal the truly complex nature of a role that appears deceivingly simple.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL

To: Charlene Berquist

Communications

901 S National Ave Springfield MO 65897-0027

From: MSU IRB

Date: 9/24/2015

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation

Study #: 16-0063

Study Title: Family Group Conference Experiences from the Perspectives of Volunteer

Facilitators

This submission has been reviewed by the Missouri State University IRB and was

determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited

above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Investigator's Responsibilities:

If your study protocol changes in such a way that exempt status would no longer apply,

you should contact the above IRB before making the changes.

CC: Rebecca Saunders

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR NEW FACILITATORS

Volunteer Family Group Conference Facilitator Perspectives
Interview Protocol for New Facilitators by Rebecca Saunders

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Becky. I am a graduate student at Missouri State University and have

worked at the Center for Dispute Resolution for about three years. I am also the

researcher conducting this study. The purpose of this study is to better understand the role

of the Family Group Conference facilitator. Specifically, I am interested in FGC

facilitator perspectives. As you know, you have been invited to participate because you

have attended a training or facilitated at least one Family Group Conference with the

Center for Dispute Resolution. I invite you to share any feelings you might have about

the topic discussed. Please remember, there are no wrong or right answers. Before the

session starts I will go ahead and collect your signed consent document. As the document

points out, I will be recording this session with a tape recorder if you give me permission

(show recorder to participant). Will you allow me to record this interview? Also,

everything you say will be kept confidential. While I may report what is said here, no one

will be able to connect what is said with you personally. Do you have any questions so

far? Let's get started.

1. How did you become involved with the Center for Dispute Resolution's FGC
   program?
2. What were your expectations when you first volunteered for the program?

3. If someone were to ask you "what is Family Group Conferencing?" how would you describe it?

    a. Follow-up: How would you describe your role in the FGC process?

    b. Follow-up: How do you believe your role as a facilitator contributes to the success of an FGC?

4. Think back to the training that you went through to become an FGC facilitator. Were there aspects of your role as facilitator that you were uncertain about or had questions about?

    a. Follow-up: Were there aspects of the process that you felt unprepared for?

    b. Probe: How have you (or will you) manage those uncertainties?

5. As we look at FGCs, most of the people who facilitate are professionals. It is unusual to have trained unpaid volunteers as facilitators. As you think about both approaches, what benefits do you think it brings to the process to have volunteers like yourself facilitating FGCs?

    a. Follow-up: Are there disadvantages or challenges that come with the volunteer role that a professional facilitating FGCs would not experience?

    b. Follow-up: What benefits and challenges might professionals experience in the facilitation role that you as a volunteer facilitator would not?

6. In what ways do you believe the FGC process is beneficial to families in this type of program?

    a. Probe: Family Group Conferencing is often seen as an empowering and restorative process for families – do you agree with this characterization?

b. Probe: Are there ways that you believe the process may disempower or disadvantage families?

7. What communication skills and personality characteristics do you believe are most important for a volunteer facilitator to possess?

    a. Probe: In what ways do you feel these skills are important to the FGC process?

    b. Probe: Do you believe these skills and traits are different for a professional who facilitates?

8. How do you think being a volunteer in this program may change you?

9. As a volunteer starting out, what type of support do you hope to receive from the Center for Dispute Resolution?

10. What have I not asked that you expected me to? What else is important for me to know?

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. Here is my contact information. If you have any questions about this study or happen to think of anything else you would like to share, please don't hesitate to contact me.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR EXPERIENCED

FACILITATORS

Volunteer Family Group Conference Facilitator Perspectives
Interview Protocol for Experienced Facilitators by Rebecca Saunders

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Becky. I am a graduate student at Missouri State University and have

worked at the Center for Dispute Resolution for about three years. I am also the

researcher conducting this study. The purpose of this study is to better understand the role

of the Family Group Conference facilitator. Specifically, I am interested in FGC

facilitator perspectives. As you know, you have been invited to participate because you

have facilitated multiple Family Group Conferences with the Center for Dispute

Resolution. I invite you to share any feelings you might have about the topic discussed.

Please remember, there are no wrong or right answers. Before the session starts I will go

ahead and collect your signed consent document. As the document points out, I will be

recording this session with a tape recorder if you give me permission (show recorder to

participant). Will you allow me to record this interview? Also, everything you say will be

kept confidential. While I may report what is said here, no one will be able to connect

what is said with you personally. Do you have any questions so far? Let's get started.

1. How did you become involved with the Center for Dispute Resolution's FGC
   program?
2. What were your initial expectations for this program?
   a. Probe: How have your experiences been similar to or different from what
      you expected?

3. Think back to the time during your training and your first FGC cases. Did you experience uncertainty about your role and what you needed to do as a facilitator? Could you talk about these?

   a. Follow-up: How did you manage these uncertainties?

   b. Follow-up: Now that you have more experience, are there still uncertainties or challenges that you experience?

      i. Probe: Could you talk about these?

   c. Follow-up: What are specific ways that you have managed these uncertainties/challenges?

4. If someone were to ask you "what is Family Group Conferencing?" how would you describe it?

   a. Follow-up: How would you describe your role in the FGC process?

      i. Probe: Do you think that role is clear to others? For example, the advocates and professionals who work with the families who participate in FGCs as well as the families themselves.

         1. Probe: What do they do or say that causes you to feel that way? In what ways do you manage these interactions?

   b. Follow-up: Follow-up: How do you believe your role as a facilitator contributes to the success of an FGC?

5. Think back to when you first decided to volunteer with the Center for Dispute Resolution's Family Group Conferencing program. What was it that caused you to be interested in volunteering with this program?

    a. Follow-up: Given where you are right now, are the things that keep you here or cause you to continue volunteering the same as those initial motivations?

    b. Follow-up: Are there experiences that have motivated you to continue participating in the program?

        ii. Probe: Could you provide an example?

    d. Follow-up: Have there been particular challenges that caused you to lose motivation or question your involvement in the program?

        i. Probe: Could you provide an example?

6. Earlier, I asked you about your initial involvement in the FGC program and the uncertainty you experienced. I would like to shift here from your uncertainty to those of others. Specifically, what uncertainties do you believe clients and their families bring to the process?

    a. Follow-up: What are things you do, as a facilitator, to help reduce that uncertainty?

7. Sometimes working with families can be an emotional experience. Have you experienced any strong emotions when working in this program?

    a. Probe: Can you think of specific examples of that?

    b. Follow-up: When there have been strong emotions, how have you managed or dealt with them personally?

        i. Probe: What strategies did you use in the moment and how did you manage it generally?

8. Are there particular FGCs that you have facilitated that stand out to you as being really successful or that you walked out of thinking "Wow that went really great"?

    a. Probe: What things happened or what did you do that made the session successful?

    b. Follow-up: Are there FGCs that did not go so well? What do you think the reasons were?

        i. Probe: If you had a do over, what might you have done differently?

9. In what ways do you believe the FGC process is beneficial to families in this type of program?

    a. Probe: Family Group Conferencing is often seen as an empowering and/or restorative process for families – do you agree with this characterization? Are there ways that you believe the process may disempower or disadvantage families?

10. As we look at FGCs, most of the people who facilitate are professionals. It is unusual to have trained unpaid volunteers as facilitators. As you think about both approaches, what benefits do you think it brings to the process to have volunteers like yourself facilitating FGCs?

    a. Follow-up: Are there disadvantages or challenges that come with the volunteer role that a professional facilitating FGCs would not experience?

    b. Follow-up: Can you think of examples of times when you feel it made a difference to the families or the FGC process in general that you were a volunteer facilitator rather than a paid professional?

    c.   What benefits and challenges might professionals experience in the facilitation role that you as a volunteer facilitator would not?

    c.   Probe: Some of the research on FGC and facilitation has argued that tensions may exist between volunteer facilitators and professionals like advocates or others. Have you seen or experienced any tensions in this regard?

11. What communication skills and personality characteristics do you believe are most important for a volunteer facilitator to possess?

    a.   Probe: Do you believe these skills and traits are different for a professional who facilitates?

12. In what ways, if any, has the experience of being a volunteer in this program influenced or changed you or your beliefs?

    a.   Probe: Could you explain that in more detail?

13. What are things that the CDR does or could do to motivate and support you as a volunteer?

14. If you were in charge of this program, what changes would you make?

15. What have I not asked that you expected me to? What else is important for me to know?

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. I have provided contact information to reach me if after the interview you think of additional information you would like to share.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Family Group Conference Facilitator Perspectives

<u>Introduction</u>
You have been asked to participate in a study to explore the role and experiences of Family Group Conference facilitators. This research is part of my (Rebecca Saunders) thesis research. Before you agree to participate in this study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. The researcher will also explain the project to you in detail. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, be sure to ask the investigator. If you have questions after completion of the interview you may contact me or my thesis advisor. Contact information for both of us is listed below.

Rebecca Saunders – Graduate Student, Missouri State University, Department of Communication
Phone: 417-622-2668
Email: Rebecca001@live.missouristate.edu

Dr. Charlene Berquist –Professor, Missouri State University, Department of Communication
Phone: 417-836-8831
Email: CharleneBerquist@missouristate.edu

You will need to sign this form giving us your permission to be involved in the study. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

<u>Purpose of this Study</u>
The purpose of this research is to understand how Family Group Conference facilitators/coordinators understand and manage their role in the process.

<u>Description of Procedures</u>
Participation in this research is completely voluntary and will have no impact on your volunteer work with the Center for Dispute Resolution's Family Group Conference program. If you agree to be part of this study, you will participate in one face-to-face interview that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded so the researcher can give their full attention to what you are saying. You may choose not to answer an interview question or you may stop the interview at any point if you become uncomfortable. There are no known risks to you from your participation in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?
The results of this study are confidential and only the researchers will have access to the information which will be kept on a secure hard drive. Your name or personal identifying information will not be used in any published reports of this research. All personal information gathered during this study will be destroyed after the completion of the project.

Consent to Participate
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date