



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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- 9 OCT 2013

Ms Leigh Baillie
fyi-request-1085-b99c8865@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Ms Baillie

Thank you for your email of 20 August 2013 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

I wish to understand why there are different rules around some FGCs.

- 1. Those attending SOME FGCs are told they are not to take notes, take information off the whiteboard, take photos of the whiteboard, while others are given a print out, allowed to remove notes, given notes to remove. Can you explain why there is this anomaly please?*
- 2. Many reports from FGCs are not a true and proper copy of what is on the whiteboard which the family have agreed to. There is no discussion in regard to those points that come out on the report and have not been discussed or agreed to by the family. Can you please explain how it is that these family members come to an agreement in regard to the safety and well being of the child and yet without further discussion with CYFS their agreement is changed to reflect something quite different?*

Child, Youth and Family is a service of the Ministry of Social Development. It protects the safety and promotes the wellbeing of children and young people and employs around 1,400 social work staff in a variety of roles including field social workers, supervisors and senior practitioners.

Family group conferences ensure families and whānau are supported to develop their own solutions to problems. Social workers, other professionals and families work together to reach agreement on how to keep a child safely within the family group.

In response to your first question, families are encouraged to share some of their most intimate details at a family group conference. Because of this, some participants will be reluctant to speak freely if they know their comments could be recorded and used out of context. This may limit the sharing of what could be essential information and could reduce the likelihood of a conference reaching an agreement.

The only formal and legal document allowed to be distributed is the Family Group Conference record. This is also known as 'The Plan'. Occasionally, participants may want to take notes and take them away. A family group conference coordinator will always explore the reasons why they want to take notes, explain the sensitivity of the information and the legal implications of publishing them.

Page 1 of 2

A coordinator cannot force participants not to take notes, or insist that notes are handed over at the end of the conference; but they will discuss and remind participants about maintaining privilege and non-publication requirements. If a participant insists on taking notes, the coordinator will remind them that "publishing a report of Family Group Conference proceedings is an offence and can result in a fine of up to \$2,000 for an individual".

A conference may use a number of mediums including whiteboards, paper and Power Point presentations to present and share information with participants. A coordinator will often record agreed actions on a whiteboard. The coordinator will then incorporate these actions into a formal agreement – the family group conference plan. This plan is given to participants after the conference. Sometimes, a coordinator may feel it is appropriate to provide copies of the whiteboard notes to participants while they wait for the plan.


In response to your second question, a coordinator will run through the actions agreed to before participants leave a conference so that everyone is clear about what has been agreed.

If a participant believes that the formal plan has not recorded the actions correctly, the participant can contact the coordinator to discuss this. If this does not resolve matters, the participant can also escalate any unresolved disagreements about the plan to a Child, Youth and Family Site Manager or a Youth Justice Manager.

I hope you find this information helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsman
PO Box 10-152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely

PP 

Bernadine Mackenzie
Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family