

## Summary Report: Formative evaluation of the iwi-led family group conference pilot

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## **Summary Report**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Porou (TRONPnui) and Oranga Tamariki have a formal agreement to address the disproportionate numbers of Ngāti Porou youth journeying through the youth justice system. This agreement involves the appointment of youth justice iwi family group conference (FGC) coordinators (iwi Coordinators) to provide Ngāti Porou youth and whānau a choice to engage in an iwi-led or an Oranga Tamariki-led FGC process.

The pilot has been in place since January 2017. An evaluation of the pilot was commissioned in June 2017 to examine the implementation of the iwi-led FGC model in particular how well the pilot has been implemented; whether the pilot has improved whānau engagement in FGCs and to what extent youth and their whānau and victims have experienced positive change. The evaluation concluded in July 2018.

### **1.2 Design and socialization of the model**

The evaluation found that Iwi Coordinators brought a significant albeit nuanced approach to their work including a stronger emphasis on face to face engagement with the young person and their whānau, taking more time to ensure they understand the process and all of the relevant information, as well as utilising whakapapa connections to connect with other whānau members in the community who can become involved to offer support and guidance.

The opportunity to evolve and grow a truly iwi-led approach was compromised by delays in setting up the project; lack of communication, engagement and socialization of the intent of the project with key local stakeholders (including Oranga Tamariki, Police and Court staff); and limited resourcing and flexibility to redesign the FGC process in line with Ngāti Porou values and principles.

Furthermore, the training provided for the iwi Coordinators was inadequate. It took over 10 months for the iwi Coordinators to participate in the youth justice FGC induction training. There was also no professional supervision made available to the iwi Coordinators which limited their ability to reflect and improve upon their practice.

As a result the iwi Coordinators did the best they could do with the resources they had however there were constant tensions between what they could do and what they were expected to achieve.

### **1.3 Engaging the young person, their whānau and victims pre FGC**

Despite challenges with redesigning and implementing a uniquely iwi-led approach to youth justice FGC's the iwi Coordinators received 53 referrals involving 26 individual youth; 41 of these referrals were court directed. The average number of days from referral to the FGC was 34 days (the legal requirement is that the FGC has to be convened no later than 21 days after which the youth justice coordinator receives the report in relation to the FGC being required).

Iwi Coordinators made on average 5.4 home visits to the young person and their whānau and on average 11 phone calls or emails. 134 visits were made to victims and 48 phone or email contacts.

The iwi Coordinators found the FGC process works much better if they can engage with the young person and their whānau right at the initial stages, that is, when they are appearing in Court. The iwi Coordinators use this initial engagement as an opportunity to introduce themselves, confirm and/or update whānau contact information. Utilisation of whanaungatanga, whakapapa and whānau-centred approaches has worked well in this context by enabling the iwi Coordinators to form relationships based on trust and respect for whānau during a stressful event. Iwi stakeholders felt that the engagement with the young person and their whānau worked better when they engaged independent of other stakeholders such as Police, youth advocates and Oranga Tamariki.

The iwi Coordinators noted that the quality and timeliness of the Police referral information package was variable delaying the opportunity to engage with the young person and their whānau early. The unilateral decision to not allocate higher complex cases involving Ngāti Porou young people to the iwi Coordinators also limited their ability to support these whānau.

Iwi stakeholders believed that the timeframes imposed in the legislation for sites to run youth justice FGCs did not allow sufficient time for iwi Coordinators to conduct a whakapapa search, engage all the relevant whānau members, understand the various layers and dynamics of whānau relationships, and organise and deliver a hui-a-whānau. While there is provision for youth justice coordinators to extend timeframes where there are special reasons – use of this provision appears to be discouraged by Oranga Tamariki.

### **1.4 The iwi-led FGC process and outcomes**

Iwi Coordinators convened and facilitated 53 FGC's, at 46 of these FGS the young person attended and in 49 the whānau attended. Victims attended only 10 of the 53 FGC's. What worked for the young person and their whānau was the way the iwi-led FGC conferences had been run, particularly the way in which the iwi Coordinators ensured that everyone had a voice in the process and got to

share their perspective or what they wanted to say. Tikanga Māori was clearly evident in all aspects of the iwi-led FGC process and strengthened the engagement of the young person and their whānau (and victim) to openly participate in the FGC process. They also appreciated the practical and genuine support provided by the Iwi Coordinator and the neutral community-based facilities where the FGC's were held.

Attendance by victims at FGC was low which is not uncommon. The iwi Coordinators did acknowledge that while victims are central to the restorative process, their focus and engagement was more on the young person and their wider whānau.

What worked well for the iwi coordinators was timely and relevant information which allowed them to engage, brief and allow whānau time to properly prepare for the FGC. Some Oranga Tamariki stakeholders believed that the iwi Coordinators still had some way to go in learning the skills to properly manage the FGC process, particularly around managing dominant personalities and overcoming challenging communication styles. Feedback, from whānau members and young people interviewed during this evaluation indicated high levels of satisfaction with the iwi-led process.

The evaluation found a clear need, desire and intent from TRONPnui to reset and take time to consider their iwi-led model of care so that they are truly able to lead and manage the FGC process on their terms. It is likely that this will include whānau/hapū/iwi ownership of the process.

## **1.5 Learnings for the future of the iwi-led model**

Ngāti Porou want the best for their children and whānau. The challenges that face rangatahi and whānau today are considerably more exacerbated than they were 20 years ago. The aspirations of TRONPnui are to mobilise Ngāti Porou whānau to be the architects of their own destiny. To be supported and strengthened by their hapū and iwi to take care of their own. In 5-10 years, TRONPnui want to see a reduction in the number of Ngāti Porou children in state care, Ngāti Porou networks nationwide being harnessed and tapped, whānau capacity and capability strengthened in an aspirational way.

A number of learnings have been identified based on the pilot that may provide useful guidelines for future collaborations with iwi around family group conferences in youth justice.

- Support and resource for iwi to develop their own model of care and measures of success based on whānau/hapū and iwi ownership of the process

- Capability and capacity building is required at a whānau, hapū, iwi level and across the workforce so that all are equipped with the range of issues, skills and knowledge required for caring for mokopuna
- Ensure collaborations with iwi are premised on shared principles, values and outcomes and enacted by all parties to the agreement at all levels of the organisation
- Enact sharing of power and control in relation to sharing data, training, resources and funding to enable joint collaborations to be effective
- Identify and mobilise champions to socialize iwi-led models amongst a range of stakeholders
- Ensure leadership supports the integrity of an iwi-led approach including enabling innovative, flexible and transformative solutions
- Allow sufficient time for iwi Coordinators to conduct whakapapa searching and hui-a-whānau
- Strengthen and resource the follow up and monitoring of FGC plans
- Resource ongoing evaluation to provide opportunities for continuous improvement
- Encourage forums for sharing information and learning across other iwi-led collaborations.

## References

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