

IV. FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Restorative Resources is a non-profit organization that provides restorative justice practices and resources to individuals, families, and communities in Sonoma County. Restorative justice is a non-punitive approach to dealing with crime that helps perpetrators take responsibility for their actions and repair harm caused to victims and the community. Restorative Resources' approach is based on restorative justice practices established in a number of different countries and areas in the United States.⁸

Restorative Resources oversees the work of five other organizations that work in different areas of Sonoma County. Restorative Resources and its partners offer Family Group Conferencing, a structured approach that involves youth, their families and support networks, victims, and other community members in resolving conflicts that arise as a result of youth-perpetrated crime. In the words of the program, the focus of the Family Group Conference (FGC) is on "putting things right, not punishment."⁹

FGC targets youth who are at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system and those who are referred to the Probation Department but are not on formal probation. Youth who have committed misdemeanors are eligible to participate; those who have committed more serious offenses are not currently eligible. Youth must admit to the charges against them in order to participate in a Family Group Conference.

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

After all interested parties have been contacted and initial meetings have been held, program staff invite everyone to a Family Group Conference. Family Group Conferences are an opportunity to bring together the young person who has offended, his/her family members and other supporters, and the victim(s) and other community members. Program staff, who are trained in the restorative justice approach, facilitate the Conference; law enforcement officers often attend the Conference. At the Family Group Conference, everyone has the opportunity to participate in the development of a plan for the youth who offended. Every plan is unique and tailored to the youth and the offense that was committed. The purpose of the plan is to repair the damage that has been done, rather than to penalize the youth for the actions he/she has committed.

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

* Because this measure will not usually apply to this program's target population, no significant difference from baseline is expected.

⁸ Source: www.restorativeresources.org

⁹ Source: Restorative Resources brochure.

After the Family Group Conference, program staff monitor youths' progress on completing their plans. In some cases, subsequent Family Group Conferences have been held if the youth is slipping on certain tasks in their plans, their adult support is not following through, or minor adjustments need to be made to the plan with the input from the victims, law enforcement, and youth.

Youths' participation in the FGC program generally lasts between three and six months, depending on how long it takes them to complete their restitution plan.

DATA SOURCES

LFA used several data sources to evaluate the FGC program¹⁰:

- JJCPA entry and exit data;
- Interviews with staff of Restorative Resources,
- Focus group with Family Group Conference Coordinators from collaborating agencies;
- Observation of a Family Group Conference
- Interviews with youth participants;
- Interviews with parents of participants; and
- Interviews with victims who participated in Family Group Conferences.

Please note that throughout the report the exhibits (tables and charts) display the number and/or percentage of youth with a particular characteristic for both the current project year (2002-2003) and the project to date (2001-2003). Unless otherwise noted, the number and percentages noted in the text refer to the number and percentage of youth for the entire project to date.

ENTRY DATA

Program Participation

This program evaluation includes data for 125 youth who entered the Family Group Conference program between July 2001 and June 2003. Of these, 34 youth entered during the first program year and 91 entered during the second. As described in the following section, the population of youth served by the program has stayed consistent over the entire project to date.

The majority of participating youth (91.1%) were referred to the program by a probation officer or law enforcement officer. The remaining youth were referred by juvenile court, through school, and through a community based organization (CBO).

Exhibit XX
Referral Source: FGC

Source (n=90), (n=124)	Current Project Year, 2003-2003		Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
PO/Law Enforcement	84	93.3%	113	91.1%
Court	2	2.2%	6	4.8%
School	2	2.2%	2	1.6%
CBO	1	1.1%	2	1.6%
Other	1	1.1%	1	0.8%

¹⁰ See Approach (page 3) for more detail.

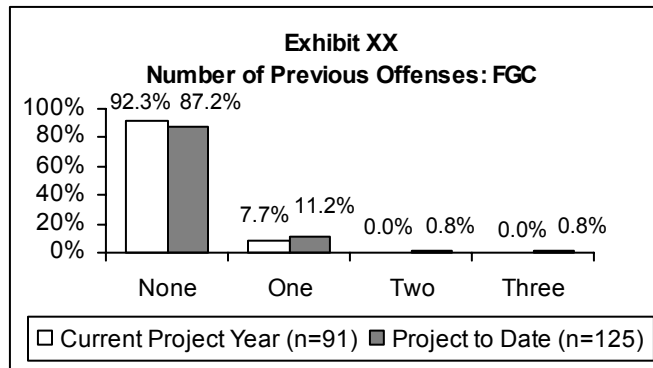
Youth are referred to the program when they have committed an offense. The types of offenses which youth committed range from petty theft to status offender crimes such as use of alcohol, from assault to extortion. As shown in Exhibit XX, youth display a number of high risk or disruptive behaviors. Most often, youth were referred to the program for vandalism or property offense (42.4%).

**Exhibit XX
Reason for Referral: FGC**

Reason (n=91), (n=125)	Current Project Year, 2002-2003		Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Vandalism/Property Offense	33	36.3%	53	42.4%
Minor Assault	16	17.6%	16	12.8%
Drug/Alcohol Use	7	7.7%	12	9.6%
Behavioral	1	1.1%	7	5.6%
Poor Academic Performance	1	1.1%	4	3.2%
Expelled/Suspended	2	2.2%	3	2.4%
Beyond Control of Family	2	2.2%	3	2.4%
Family Issues	1	1.1%	1	0.8%
Truancy/School Attendance	0	0.0%	1	0.8%

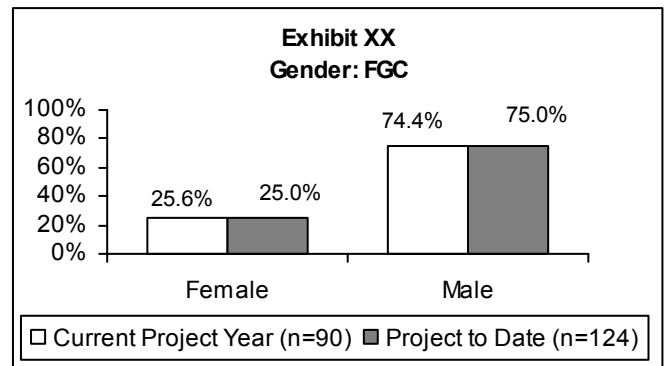
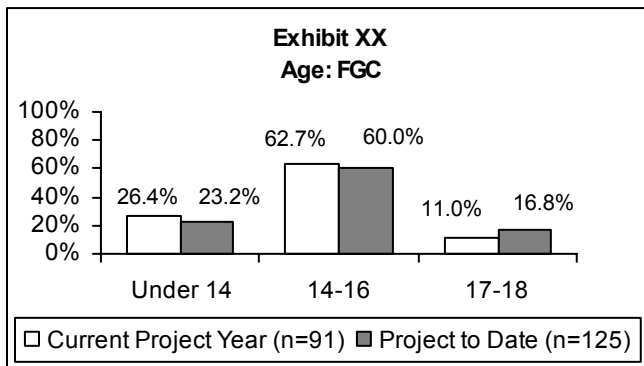
* Totals and percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could check all that apply.

A small percentage of youth (12.8%) had committed one or more previous offenses prior to entry into the program.



Participant Characteristics

Youth who participated in the Family Group Conference program range in age from 7 to 17 years. The average age of participants is 15 years. Three-quarters of the youth who participated in the program are male (75.0%).



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

Exhibit XX
Race: FGC

Race (n=91), (n=125)	Current Project Year, 2002-2003		Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	65	71.4%	95	76.0%
Hispanic	13	14.3%	16	12.8%
Other Asian	3	3.3%	4	3.2%
Black	3	3.3%	3	2.4%
Multi Racial	2	2.2%	2	1.6%
American Indian	1	1.1%	1	.8%
Cambodian	1	1.1%	1	.8%
Laotian	1	1.1%	1	.8%
Other	2	2.2%	2	1.6%

Nearly all of the youth who participated in the program were enrolled in school (97.6%), and most were in grades 8-10 (63.3%).

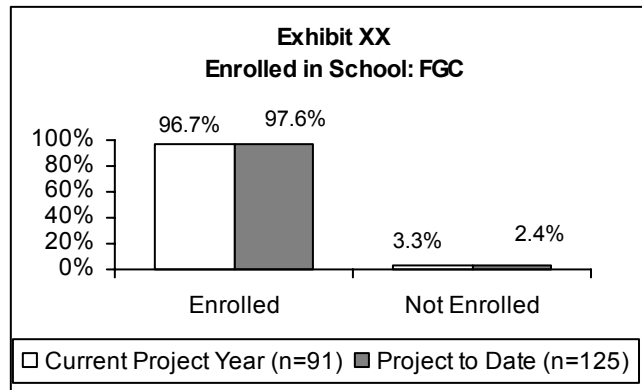


Exhibit XX
Grade Level: FGC

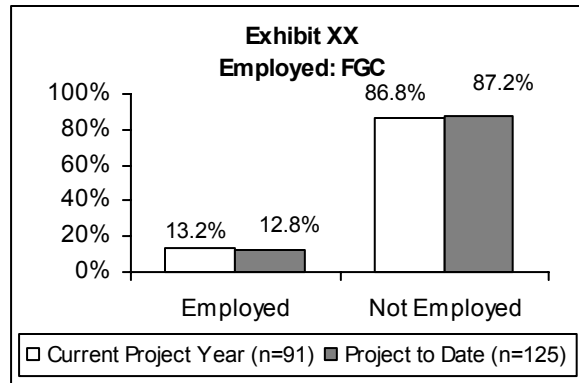
Grade (n=86), (n=120)	Current Project Year (2002-2003)		Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
7 th grade or lower	13	15.1%	15	12.5%
8 th to 10 th grade	55	63.9%	76	63.3%
11 th to 12 th grade	16	19.0%	29	24.1%

As shown in Exhibit XX, most FGC participants attended public school at time of program entry (79.5%), although some students attended alternative, community day, court-related, and other types of schools.

Exhibit XX
Type of School Enrolled In: FGC

Type of School (n=88), (n=122)	Current Project Year, 2002-2003		Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Public School	68	77.3%	97	79.5%
Alternative School	9	10.2%	11	9.0%
Court/Community School	4	4.5%	5	4.1%
Continuation School	4	4.5%	4	3.3%
Private School	1	1.1%	1	.8%
Community Day School	0	0%	1	.8%
Other	2	2.3%	3	2.5%

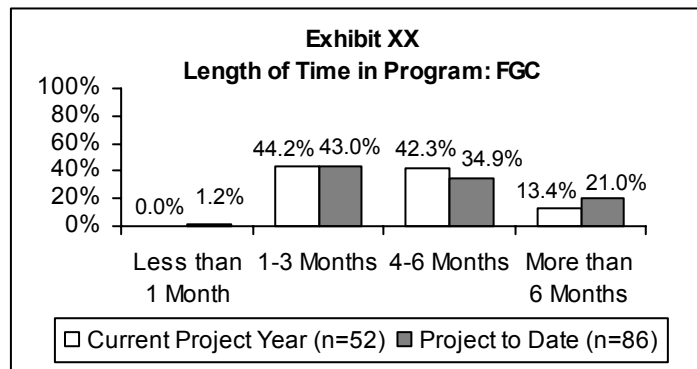
As shown in Exhibit XX, at the time they were referred to the Family Group Conference program, most of the youth (87.2%) were not employed.



EXIT DATA

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

Exit data were available for 88 (70.4%) of the 125 youth who participated during the project year. Among this group of 86 youth, it took youth an average of five months (142 days) to complete the FGC process. However, one youth spent as little as three weeks (21 days), and another spent almost 12 months (354 days) in the program. Those who successfully completed the program participated for an average of 24 days longer than those who did not complete the program.



State-Required Outcomes

The Family Group Conferencing program is designed as an early intervention program for youth who are at-risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. The program is not specifically designed to serve youth who are on formal probation. That said, five of the youth for whom exit data were available were on probation at time of program entry. Four youth were put on probation during the program. Most of the youth were never on probation during the program.

One measure of the program's success is if youth do not become involved (or further involved in the case of a few participants) with the juvenile justice system after program entry. Of the 88 youth for whom exit data is available, 10 of them (11.4%) had some type of contact with the juvenile justice system between program entry and exit. As shown in Exhibit XX, 9 (10.2%) were

arrested, 2 (2.3%) had sustained petitions, and 3 (3.4%) were incarcerated. None of the participating youth had adjudicated violations of probation.

**Exhibit XX
Involvement with the Juvenile Justice System at Exit: FGC**

Outcome Measure	Current Project Year, 2002-2003		Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Were Arrested (n=54), (n=88)	4	7.4%	9	10.2%
With Sustained Petitions (n=54), (n=88)	2	3.7%	2	2.3%
Were Incarcerated (n=54), (n=88)	2	3.7%	3	3.4%
Had Adjudicated Violations of Probation (n=54), (n=88)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Any Contact with Juvenile Justice System* (n=54), (n=88)	5	9.3%	10	11.4%

*This includes arrests, sustained petitions, incarcerations, and adjudicated violations of probation.

To assess whether there were significant differences among groups of participants in terms of their rates of recidivism and other types of contact with the juvenile justice system, the evaluators compared youth who entered during the first year of the program with those who entered during the second year of the program, male and female participants, and youth of difference races.¹¹ Results from these tests may not be reliable due to the small number of youth who had contact with the juvenile justice system between program entry and exit, but where significant differences were found they are included in Exhibit XX below.

Participants in the previous program year (2001-2002) were more likely have been arrested. On the other hand, participants of the current program year (2002-2003) were more likely to have sustained petitions. Female participants are more likely to have been arrested and to have sustained petitions than their male counterparts.

**Exhibit XX
Differences in Involvement with the Juvenile Justice System at Exit, by Type of Participant: FGC**

Outcome Measure	Differences in Outcomes by Type of Participant
Were Arrested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants of the previous project year (2001-2002) were more likely to get arrested than current year participants (14.7% and 7.4%, respectively, p=.031) ▪ Females are more likely to get arrested than males (16.7% and 8.7%, respectively, p=.063)
With Sustained Petitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants of the current project year (2002-2003) were more likely to have sustained petitions than current year participants (3.7% and 0.0%, respectively, p=.021) ▪ Females were more likely to have sustained petitions than males (11.1% and 0.0%, respectively, p<.001)
Were Incarcerated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth of color were more likely to be incarcerated than White youth (10.0% and 1.5%, respectively, p<.001)
Had Adjudicated Violations of Probation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NA

¹¹ The evaluators also assessed whether youths' level of involvement with the juvenile justice system (based on number of prior contacts) and reasons for referral to a JJCPA program made a significant difference in program outcomes. Findings were inconclusive and, therefore, are not included in this report.

Outcomes related to increasing completion of probation, restitution and community service do not generally apply here since the Family Group Conferencing program is designed to prevent youth from involvement with the juvenile justice system rather than support youth who are involved with the system. Although the program is not specifically designed to do so, youth in the program are making progress at completing the requirements of their probation. Of the five¹² youth who were on probation at program entry, three had completed their probation at exit; of the four youth who were ordered to pay restitution, one had done so at exit; and of the eight youth ordered to complete community service, six youth had done so.

Local Outcome Measures

Program Completion

One measure of this programs' effectiveness is the number of youth who successfully complete the process. Over three-quarters of the youth (76.5%) for whom exit data were available successfully completed the program. All of the youth who had committed previous offenses prior to program entry completed the program.¹³ More detail is provided in Exhibit XX about why youth did not successfully complete the program.

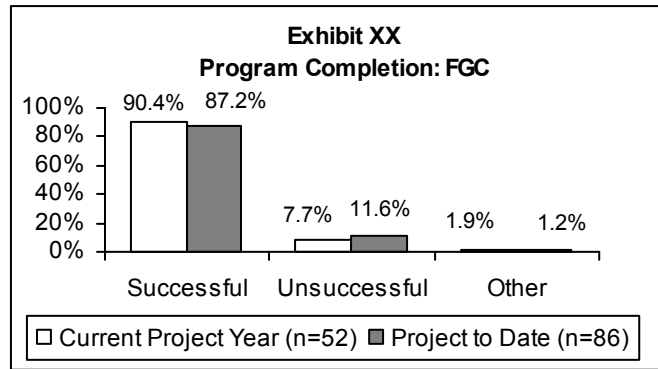


Exhibit XX
Reason for Unsuccessful Program Completion: FGC

Reason (n=5), (n=11)	Current Project Year, 2002-2003		Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Partial Completion of Program	4	80.0%	7	63.6%
Failure to Appear at Appointments	0	0%	1	9.1%
Poor Performance or Behavior in Program	0	0%	1	9.1%
Parent Removed Youth from the Program	0	0%	1	9.1%
Other	1	20.0%	1	9.1%

As seen in Exhibit XX, current year participants were more likely than first year participants to complete the program successfully.

¹² There is a discrepancy in the database regarding the number of youth on probation at program entry. According to one variable, 5 youth were on program at program entry and according to another variable 7 youth on were on program at program entry. This discrepancy makes it difficult to accurately assess the percentage of youth who completed their probation at other time periods.

¹³ Three of the youth for whom exit data were available had committed previous offenses.

Exhibit XX
Differences in Program Completion, by Type of Respondent: FGC

Outcome Measure	Differences in Outcomes by Type of Respondent
Program Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current year participants are more likely to complete the program successfully than previous year participants (92.2% and 82.4% respectively, p=.007)

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

Exhibit XX
Select Outcomes Narratives at Program Exit¹⁴

<p>Positive Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nick has turned his life around and made strong leaps with school, at home, and in the community. He finished his plan ahead of schedule and his mother feels he is on a good track. ▪ Ryan went beyond the requirements of his plan, attending meetings on a voluntary basis to help develop a better sportsmanship program at the two high schools involved. He also did all his community service hours in a respectful manner. ▪ Theo moved quickly on completing his tasks and worked hard to restore the friendship with the victim. I called the victim and he felt very good about the outcome. ▪ Tim's parents became far more involved in Tim's activities and whereabouts. Also, they sought referrals for counseling regarding anger management when the program ended. <p>Partial or No Positive Outcomes Noted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The youth completed her plan but had a pending case from a further offense. ▪ The youth had difficulty completing the components of the plan due to several factors.
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Improvement in Risk and Protective Factors

The primary goal of the Family Group Conferencing program is to assist youth in taking responsibility for and repairing harm caused by their actions. To assess the impact of FGC on youth participants, program staff implemented a Risk and Protective Factors Assessment.¹⁵ Program staff complete the instrument at youths’ entry and exit from the program.

The Risk and Protective Assessment has four dimensions: school, home, community, and personal. Each of these sections has several different indicators. LFA calculated a total score by summing the four sub-scores and grouped youth into low, moderate, and high risk categories based on these scores.¹⁶ As seen in Exhibits XX-XX, in every category, more youth were in the lower risk category at exit than they were at time of entry. In all four areas, a smaller number of individuals exhibited risk factors at exit than at entry.¹⁷

¹⁴ Where a youths’ name was recorded, it has been replaced with “Minor.” Some statements have been shortened and made more generic, so that they could not be easily associated with one individual.

¹⁵ This assessment is also used by the Functional Family Therapy program, which serves youth that have similar characteristics and needs as the Family Group Conference program. This instrument has been in use at SAY, the nonprofit organization at which the FFT program is based, for several years.

¹⁶ At the time of this assessment, the staff person at SAY who was responsible for implementing the Risk/Protective Assessment was no longer at the organization. CPA 2000 had included this instrument in its evaluation design, but was not able to provide information about this assessment or how to analyze results. Evaluators grouped youth who scored in the lowest third (indicating more risk factors, in the “high risk category,” those in the mid-third in the “moderate risk category” and in the highest third (indicating fewer risk factors) in the “low risk category.” Based on their research, the evaluators were not able to determine conclusively whether this is a standardized scale or if this is the appropriate method of scoring the data.

¹⁷ The differences were statistically significant at the highest level, p.001, with the exception of community scores where p=.042.

**Exhibit XX
FGC School Scores**

	Current Project Year Entry (n=90) / Exit (n=52)			Project to Date Entry (n=122) / Exit (n=86)		
	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk
Entry	60.0%	26.7%	13.3%	59.0%	27.9%	13.1%
Exit	84.6%	13.5%	1.9%	81.4%	16.3%	2.3%

**Exhibit XX
FGC Home Scores**

	Current Project Year Entry (n=90) / Exit (n=52)			Project to Date Entry (n=122) / Exit (n=86)		
	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk
Entry	57.8%	36.7%	5.6%	55.7%	35.2%	9.0%
Exit	86.5%	13.5%	0%	76.7%	17.4%	5.8%

**Exhibit XX
FGC Personal Scores**

	Current Project Year Entry (n=90) / Exit (n=52)			Project to Date Entry (n=122) / Exit (n=86)		
	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk
Entry	26.7%	71.1%	2.2%	27.9%	68.9%	3.3%
Exit	53.8%	46.2%	0%	50.0%	50.0%	0%

**Exhibit XX
FGC Community Scores**

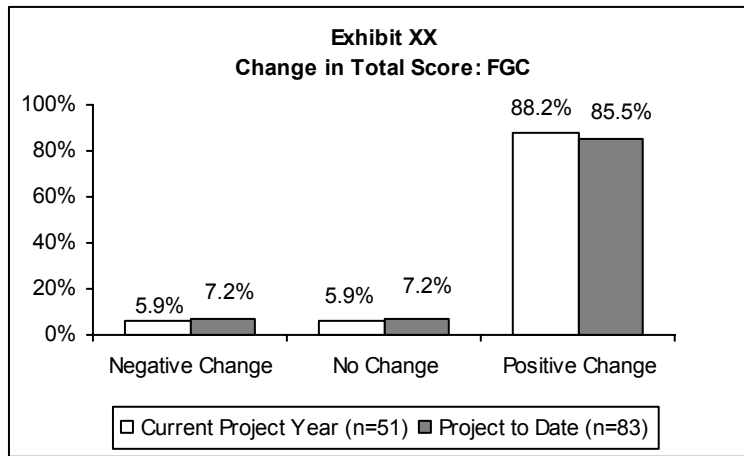
	Current Project Year Entry (n=90) / Exit (n=52)			Project to Date Entry (n=122) / Exit (n=86)		
	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk
Entry	37.8%	35.6%	26.7%	35.2%	36.9%	27.9%
Exit	82.7%	13.5%	3.8%	80.2%	14.0%	5.8%

**Exhibit XX
FGC Total Scores**

	Current Project Year Entry (n=90) / Exit (n=52)			Project to Date Entry (n=122) / Exit (n=86)		
	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	Higher Risk
Entry	34.4%	55.6%	10.0%	31.1%	59.0%	9.8%
Exit	76.9%	23.1%	0%	67.4%	30.2%	2.3%

As shown in Exhibit XX, a large percentage of youth (85.5%) experienced positive change (a decrease in risk factors) in from entry to exit. Because this Risk and Protective Factors Assessment was originally designed for participants in a therapy program and was adapted to measure change for youth who participate in Family Group Conferences it is still unclear how precise this tool is in measuring outcomes for Family Group Conference program participants.

Nevertheless, based on these scores, it appears that some youth experienced significant changes between program entry and exit.



FOLLOW-UP DATA

Three months after youth complete their plan (and approximately nine months after program entry), Department staff conduct a records check to collect follow-up data for all participants. The purpose of data collected at this time period (referred to by the Department as the “evaluation period”) is to assess outcomes related to the criminal justice system. Data collected at this time period can provide information about whether positive effects of the program are sustained over time and whether youth who complete the program remain outside of the juvenile justice system. Follow-up data were available for 50 of the 125 youth (40.0%) who participated since the beginning of the project (July 1, 2001). No follow-up data was available for current project year participants.

As at the time of program exit, a total of four youth (8.0%) had some level of contact with the juvenile justice system during the follow-up period. Three youth were arrested (6.0%), two (4.0%) had sustained petitions, one (2.0%) was incarcerated and one (2.0%) had adjudicated violations of probation.

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

Outcome Measure	Project to Date, 2001-2003	
	Number	Percent
Were Arrested (n=50)	3	6.0%
With Sustained Petitions (n=50)	2	4.0%
Were Incarcerated (n=50)	1	2.0%
Had Adjudicated Violations of Probation (n=50)	1	2.0%
Any Contact with Juvenile Justice System* (n=50)	4	8.0%

*This includes arrests, sustained petitions, incarcerations, and adjudicated violations of probation.

Overall, the number of FGC participants who had contact with the juvenile justice system at follow-up was too small to determine whether any particular groups of youth were more likely to become involved with the system. At the end of the follow-up period, there had been no change

in the completion of probation requirements since entry: of the five¹⁸ youth who were on probation at program entry, three had completed their probation at exit; of the four youth who were ordered to pay restitution, one had done so at exit; and of the eight youth ordered to complete community service, six youth had done so.

Comparing Program Participants to Study Group Participants

For this evaluation, Department staff created a study group, so that data for program participants can be compared to data for the study group to assess whether the program appears to have been effective. Evaluators compared outcomes for these 50 program participants to outcomes for the 31 study group members. There are several limitations to the type of statistical analysis that can be completed to compare outcomes for the program participants to the study group.¹⁹ However, Exhibit XX provides an overview of differences in criminal justice outcomes for the two groups.

Findings are classified as “positive” if a smaller proportion of program participants were involved with the juvenile justice system as compared to the study group and “negative” if a larger proportion of program participants were involved during the follow-up period.

Both the youth who participate in the program and those who were assigned to the study group have had relatively limited contact with the juvenile justice system during the follow-up period, but a smaller proportion of FGC participants were arrested, had sustained petitions, and were held in custody compared to study group participants. One FGC participant (2.0%) had an adjudicated violation of probation at the end of the follow-up period and no study group participants did. Overall, FGC participants had less involvement with the juvenile justice system than study group participants did during the follow-up period.

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

Outcome Measure	All Program Participants	Study Group	Sig.	Finding
Were Arrested (n=50), (n=31)	6.0%	35.5%	p<.001	Positive, statistically significant
With Sustained Petitions (n=50), (n=31)	4.0%	16.1%	p<.001	Positive, statistically significant
Were Incarcerated (n=50), (n=31)	2.0%	9.7%	p=.002	Positive, statistically significant
Had Adjudicated Violations of Probation (n=50), (n=31)	2.0%	0.0%	p=.113	Negative, not statistically significant

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

¹⁸ There is a discrepancy in the database regarding the number of youth on probation at program entry. According to one variable, 5 youth were on program at program entry and according to another variable 7 youth on were on program at program entry. This discrepancy makes it difficult to accurately assess the percentage of youth who completed their probation at other time periods.

¹⁹ See Data Analysis and Presentation the Approach Chapter, pages 4-5.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Participant Assessment

Evaluators conducted interviews with nine youth, eight parents and six victim/representatives who participated in Family Group Conferences. The purpose of these interviews was to hear their assessment of how the program worked for them, strengths of the program, and ways it could be improved. Family Group Conferences are facilitated by five different organizations; in order to get a full perspective of participants, evaluators made an effort to interview cases from each of the participating organizations. In addition, some individuals who evaluators interviewed participated in Family Group Conferences with youth who successfully completed the program; others participated in Conferences with youth who did not. Each Family Group Conference is a unique event. Although the evaluators made an effort to interview participants from a range of Family Group Conferences, the perspectives provided below are those of the sample that was contacted. Respondents shared valuable information and where there were trends in comments evaluators noted them; however, one can not assume that these individuals represent the opinions of all program participants.

"I learned my lesson. I learned I made a mistake and I shouldn't have done it."

- Youth FGC Participant

Youth, parents, and victims all expressed a high level of appreciation for having FGC as an alternative to the juvenile system. Youth felt that it provided them with a better option for correcting their wrong-doings than through the juvenile court system. Parents saw the process as a positive way to teach a lesson to their youth. Victims saw the process as a way for them to be compensated (sometimes through the process alone and sometimes through restitution) for the damages done to them.

"The process took place in a non-shaming way. The punitive way does not work – this way is an intervention. It told him – 'you are a good child but you made a bad choice in your behavior.' It helped him."

- Parent, FGC Participant

Participants often seemed surprised at how positive an experience the Family Group Conference was for them. Many youth described the biggest impact of the process as meeting face-to-face with the victim. As one youth described, "I got to hear the victims' opinions and they got to hear my reasoning about why it happened." Parents and victims concurred that this was the main benefit of the process. As one parent described, her child could see "a face or faces of people, it wasn't just property that he had bashed. Real people....They suffered a loss." One individual appreciated the opportunity to "get a relationship with the person you insulted." The relationships developed during the Family Group Conference sometimes even go beyond the actual conference and carrying out of the plan. One youth continues to receive cards of support from the victim of his crime.

In general, victims agreed that the program was beneficial to the youth and also satisfied their need to have justice served. They were also satisfied with the level and type of contact they received from the facilitator of the Family Group Conference. In some cases, victims asked to be kept more up to date in terms of how well the youth is completing his/her plan. One victim said, "In the end, I want to know the full story."

"I thought it was an opportunity for him to have a second chance. It was an opportunity for him to be exposed to a different option. It was an opportunity to turn him around."

- Victim, FGC Participant

The number of people who participate in the Family Group Conference can vary and the size of the Conference can affect participants' experience. One youth was involved in a Conference that was quite large and involved several different families. This youth suggested that program staff "should limit the number of people involved or [have] different sessions for the different issues that need to be raised." The fact that so many people were present made it difficult for everyone to be involved in the process. On the other hand, in the case of a youth whose large family and several friends participated in the conference, both the youth and victim appreciated the many different perspectives of the youth's situation were present during the conference. The youth felt

supported by a large network and the victim felt like he saw the whole picture of the youth. This suggests that program staff should carefully consider whether the size of the group that attends the Family Group Conference will be appropriate for the case.

Some participants were satisfied with the plans that were developed as part of the Family Group Conference; others were less satisfied. Reflecting on the plan they had developed and carried through, several youth said it was harder than they expected. The plans they developed were demanding. During the previous project year, one parent said that she would have appreciated more guidance from the staff about how to develop an appropriate plan. The plan that was developed for her child involved a lot of steps. She said, "We were throwing things out because we didn't know what we were doing. [Staff] should have realized that it would have been too much." Contrastingly, many parents from the current project year felt that the plan was reasonable for both the youth and the parent and was appropriate given the nature of the crime. This may suggest that over time staff have gotten more adept at developing plans that fit the crime but are also manageable for families.

Staff Assessment

Evaluators conducted a focus group of Family Group Conference Coordinators and met with Restorative Resources' staff to get their perspective on the effectiveness of the program, and changes they have considered in order to increase the program's effectiveness. Even in its second year, the Family Group Conference approach is still new to the Sonoma County juvenile justice system. Last year, staff of the program provided evaluators with several ways in which the relationship between this program and the Probation Department and courts could be improved and to some extent those issues still exist. First, staff noted that it would be beneficial for cases to be referred to them soon after offenses were committed. The process benefits from participants who still have strong feelings about what has occurred. If too much time has passed, the Family Group Conference can be less of a cathartic and effective event. In several cases, in which youth did not successfully complete their plan, they were referred back to the Probation Department. Program staff noted that there was not always adequate follow-up from the department. These instances seemed to undermine the validity of the program. From program staff's perspective, this could send a dangerous signal to youth if word got out that they would not be held accountable for their actions. As with last year, staff asserted their belief that the Family Group Conference program is not only successful with youth who are at-risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system, but also for more serious crimes by youth who are entrenched in the system.

CONCLUSION

The Family Group Conference program is designed to empower youth and their supporters to develop plans that will help them confront and repair the harm they have done to others in their community. When it is most effective, the program deals with youth holistically, helping them to get the counseling and other services they may need. According to narratives provided by program staff, many of the youth who successfully completed the program actually went beyond the specifications of their plans to do more to repair the harm they had caused. Staff, parents, and victims also describe the positive impact the program has had on the youth including increased self-esteem, increased interest in school and extra-curricular activities and a more positive outlook overall. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, it appears that the program has been effective in preventing youth from becoming involved with the juvenile justice system and decreasing their risk factors.