



<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz>

ResearchSpace@Auckland

Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage.

<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback>

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the [Library Thesis Consent Form](#) and [Deposit Licence](#).

Note : Masters Theses

The digital copy of a masters thesis is as submitted for examination and contains no corrections. The print copy, usually available in the University Library, may contain alterations requested by the supervisor.

Second Chances: Youth Justice Co-ordinators' Perspectives on the
Youth Justice Family Group Conference Process

Christine Marie Slater

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology, University of Auckland, 2009

ABSTRACT

In New Zealand's system of Youth Justice (YJ) the Family Group Conference (FGC) process plays a pivotal role in addressing the offending behaviour of young people under seventeen. Mandated under the Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act 1989 (the Act), the FGC is a formal meeting in which the persons most affected by a young person's offending, typically the young person, their family, their victim(s) and associated professionals, collectively decide how the young person should be held accountable. The process is managed by a YJ Co-ordinator, appointed by the Department of Child, Youth and Family (the Department). This dissertation presents the findings of an evaluation of the YJ FGC process from the perspectives of YJ Co-ordinators.

The study aimed to understand the process and the development of practice, to identify factors constituting best practice and current areas of weakness in the process. It comprised of semi-structured interviews with ($n=19$) YJ Co-ordinators with at least twelve years' practitioner experience (Project One) and four focus groups ($n=27$) of Co-ordinators with a range of practice (Project Two). Three major themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data: a) *The Act as Anchor* – philosophical underpinnings of the FGC process, b) *Working with the Act* – best practice and current issues in YJ FGC service provision, and c) *The Office* – organisational factors.

The results indicated the YJ FGC process was effective for the majority of young people, but generally inadequate for recidivist young offenders with complex additional needs. Aspects of best practice included: aligned professional approaches to FGC philosophy and practice, service delivery by trained YJ Co-ordinators and the quality of FGC preparation. Also considered best practice was the inclusion of victims in the process to assist in the development of a strengths-based personalised plan for the young person. With several areas of weakness identified, recommendations for improving the process included: addressing Co-ordinator training and Departmental leadership, reviewing the process for recidivists, improving process information quality, enhancing professional collaboration and addressing Police training in the Act and the FGC. Limitations of the study and directions for future research are discussed.

*This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially Danielle and Thomas
and to the memory of my parents.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes to Dr Ian Lambie, my patient, wise and magnanimous supervisor for his guidance and constant encouragement to ensure I kept my “eyes on the prize”. Thank you also to Dr Heather McDowell, my gracious secondary supervisor. I extend particular thanks and appreciation to Dr Gabrielle Maxwell whose pioneering work in this area of research has been a constant source of inspiration. Thank you for sharing your invaluable expertise and for your personal support as I embarked upon this process. I acknowledge the assistance of the University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship and of the Department of Child, Youth and Family, who funded the study.

I would like to express my gratitude to the YJ Co-ordinators who took part in this study, so generously giving of their time and knowledge. I especially appreciate the additional assistance of the several Co-ordinators who conducted stakeholder checking at various stages throughout the research process.

My classmates have been a constant source of inspiration and support during my journey through the clinical psychology programme. Maia, Sarah and Vicki, I cannot even begin to express how privileged I feel to have been able to walk this path with you. Thank you for sharing this amazing experience with me, of giving of yourselves without reservation or hesitation, and particularly for all the fun and laughter. I am blessed by your grace and care.

I would like to express my love and thanks to my family and extended family and to my friends, both here and in the United Kingdom. As ever, I treasure your love and support, and especially so during these incredible “thesis years”. Most of all, thank you for understanding how important this endeavour has been for me. I would like to say a special thank you to Louise for providing my wonderful writer’s retreat, and to Richard, Anna, Marnie and Vicki for so generously acting as my personal quality monitors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
The phenomenon of the age/crime curve.....	3
Statistics of offending by children and young people in New Zealand	4
Theories of youth crime	9
Risk and protective factors related to youth offending.....	13
Managing youth offending in New Zealand	26
Restorative justice.....	42
The New Zealand YJ FGC.....	50
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY	64
Background history to the study	64
Aims of the study.....	65
Method.....	71
CHAPTER THREE: THE ACT AS ANCHOR	81
The Act is built on solid foundations.....	81
Varying professional perspectives on the Act detracts from a cohesive YJ FGC process.....	85
CHAPTER FOUR: WORKING WITH THE ACT.....	91
Factors promoting effective practice in YJ FGC service provision.....	91
Current process issues.....	114
CHAPTER FIVE: THE OFFICE – ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS.....	129
Management’s commitment to YJ is questioned	129
Training and development	132
Thoughts on the ‘new way of working’ proposed under the restructure	134
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	139
Overview.....	139
Key findings.....	139
Utilisation of research findings.....	158
Recommendations.....	158
APPENDICES	167
REFERENCES.....	179

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Police apprehension rates per 10,000 population of 10-13 year olds and 14-16 year olds for non-traffic offences, by offence class 2006 and 2007.....	6
Table 2. Individual, family and environmental factors contributing to an increased risk for youth offending.	15
Table 3. Risk factors by category for future offending in children and adolescents.....	22
Table 4. Protective factors for youth considered to prevent or mitigate risk of future offending by category.....	23
Table 5. Features of the major models of restorative justice used to address the offending behaviour of young people	47
Table 6. Connolly’s Research and Evaluation Strategy for Care and Protection showing defined strategic framework and strategic focus of each component.....	65
Table 7. Ethnicity of YJ Co-ordinators in Project One	74
Table 8. Ethnicity of YJ Co-ordinators in Project Two.....	76
Table 9. Distribution of Project Two Participants by Average Length of Service, Gender and Ethnicity.....	76

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of Youth Court cases for young people for all offences except non-imprisonable traffic offences in 1995 and for the years 2004-2007 by outcome.....	7
Figure 2. New Zealand-identified developmental offending trajectories against risk for future offending	17
Figure 3. Pathways through New Zealand’s YJ system for youth	38
Figure 4. Flow on effects of problematic inputs into the YJ FGC process	147
Figure 5. Flow on effects of difficulties between Co-ordinators and Youth Aid in the Pre-FGC consultation phase of the process	148
Figure 6. Flow on effects of reduced Co-ordinator preparation time.....	149
Figure 7. Flow on effects for the FGC meeting without adequate preparation time and poor Co-ordinator-Police consultation.....	151
Figure 8. Flow on effects of poor Post-FGC follow-up and low Social Worker support	152