FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE
INNOVATIVE MODEL OF SUPPORT FOR
CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT RISKS
IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Five years programme implementation assessment report
Aleksandar Bozic

“FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE – INNOVATIVE MODEL OF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT RISK IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA”

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1. INTRODUCTION

Changes that occur in the family impose the need for greater and more diverse social support of the family in performing its functions. Society has a responsibility to provide support for the families in situations that require professional help through social, health, educational and other services, and cash benefits as well as providing and developing a series of services that contribute to strengthening families and preventing their social exclusion. Due to the poor and imbalanced access to the services intended for the families in the local community, due to the limited financial resources and the capacity of the existing services, lack of specialists, as well as the changes that occur in the families, there is a need to develop new, innovative approaches, in order to adequately respond to the needs of families in solving complex problems, mobilizing their own resources, strength and power.

Family Group Conference (FGC) is defined as the international contemporary model of support to children and families facing life crises and problems. A family, through the model of family gatherings, support and assistance by their social networks activates their own power to solve and overcome life’s challenges and problems faced.

Independent facilitation of the conferences (meetings) is one of the main features of this model. In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the relevant civil society organisations - partner organisations of the “In foundation” are in charge of the implementation of the conference. Their members are trained in this model and they have established partnerships with local institutions of the social protection or education system to provide this service. Educated independent coordinators are responsible for the coordination of the independent family conferences. Family meetings are held on neutral ground, outside the institutions of the system, usually in properly equipped premises of the civil society organisations that are developing this model in their local communities. The selection and initiation of the families for this model are conducted by a competent centre for social work, but the school community too, through developed partnership with a local organisation of civil society.
1.1. Family Group Conference in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the implementation of the family group conferences (FGC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) four groups are involved:

- **The initiator of the family group conference**
  In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the initiators are employees of the social welfare centres / case managers, but if necessary, they can be the representatives of the school, representatives of other institutions from the system of social protection, health, justice and so on. Family group conference is offered to the interested family by the initiator (professional) who has successfully passed the training programme to initiate the conference.

- **Local Project Manager**
  This person comes from a local partner civil society organisation that is responsible for the implementation of the FGC project and the application of the model directly in the practice. He/she bridges the gap between the centre for social work, family and independent coordinator, who organises and provides logistical support for the implementation of the conference.

- **Independent coordinator**
  This is a person who has gone through the selection process and a special training programme for the independent coordinators of the family group conference. This person is independent and not in the service of any institution, usually a part of the civil society. He or she is trained in organising and managing conferences.

- **Family and its network**
  A beneficiary of the family group conference is a family in crisis or one of its members (a child / young person or a vulnerable adult) who accepts to use the model of family conferences to seek a solution to a particular challenge or difficulty which they are not able to overcome on their own. Members of these families may be registered users of the social welfare centres, day care centres for children and adults, health centres, schools. Members of the family and social network are: family members, relatives, friends, neighbours of the family members, colleagues and others who are willing to contribute to the success of the family group conference by their personal engagement.

  **Family plan** - all members of the family and broader family network that are present at a family group conference are tasked to define a plan to solve the problem, without the engagement and participation of the initiator (e.g. professional from the centre for social work or independent coordinator). The plan includes deadlines and facilitators of the concrete tasks and it is approved if it is according to law and safe.
Model application options in relation to family issues:

- providing support to the family/parent (e.g. when a parent is unable to independently take care of the children)
- under guardianship (e.g. in cases of taking care of children without parental care)
- unsettled family and family-legal relations (domestic violence, divorce)
- as a precursor to the court proceedings: amendment to the decision on the guardianship of a child,
- in children who have problems at school (behaviour, bullying, learning problems, not attending school, etc.)
- in adolescent developmental crises and expressing unfavourable social behaviour (juvenile offenders, abuse of alcohol, drugs and the like.)
- in severe and permanent physical/mental illness of family members,
- affected by the loss (job, country, family member, property).
- in foster care

1.1. Theoretical framework

This model is based on the crisis intervention theory and the general system theory, and it is expanded by application of the competency model because the increase of the competence of parents and children is one of the goals of the treatment. The model supports the approach which is focused on strength - relying on their own capacities and recognition of their own resources to resolve the difficulties or adverse conditions. Special emphasis is placed on the orientation of the goals; the beneficiaries participate in setting goals (family plan) and taking control of their own lives. At the same time, the model includes the coordination and cooperation between different participants (broader family and social networks), as well as organisations and institutions of the system that provide services to children and families. This type of the intervention presupposes the clear definition of the specific problems, and the emphasis is on the positive strengths of each system the child/young person belongs to (family, relatives, friends, the broader social environment, school, peer group), which are the main drivers of change (Havnen & Christiansen, 2014; Burgund, 2014; Frost, Abram, and Burgess, 2014; Olson 2009; Huntsman 2006).

In relation to the similar interventions that have been applied in the work with families in which children and young people at risk do not have an important role or are completely invisible, the family group conference model aims to involve the child in the entire process and to provide them with an opportunity to form and express their views freely on all matters concerning the child, which is in accordance with the principles of the UN Convention on the rights of the child. The changes experienced by children participating in the family group conferences are related to the reduction of their concerns regarding the relationship with the parents or the inter-parental relationship, the situation at home, at school, with friends and peers. For younger children or young people who are under special circumstances it is necessary to provide the support of the person that they choose to represent them at the meeting, or to be their direct support. The children express the highest level of satisfaction by bringing together the invited representatives of kinship and social networks and opportunities to express their opinion (Aziz, 2011; Weigensberg, Barth, & Guo, 2009; Morris & Burford, 2007).
1.2. A chronological overview of the development model FGC in Bosnia and Herzegovina

“In foundation” – a foundation for strengthening social inclusion of children and young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with the donor foundation "Kinderpostzegels" from the Netherlands recognized the importance of investing in innovative models in the context of the development and improvement of the social sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The family group conference is a regular programme activity of the “In foundation”, which is responsible for providing financial, professional, technical support, monitoring the transfer and development of this model at the national level, while the implementation of the pilot model in the context of the social sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is developing in cooperation with selected local partner organisations of the civil society in selected communities.

The first steps in developing the pilot model in Bosnia and Herzegovina were made in June 2010. With the support of the OSCE Bosnia and Herzegovina and on the initiative of the management of the Public Institution "Centre for Social Work" Sarajevo Canton and the Public Institution "Centre for Social Work" Banja Luka an introductory presentation and first training for the application and implementation of the family group conference were organised. On that occasion, the training was attended by 25 individuals who had passed the selection process for the independent coordinators of the family conferences and 16 initiators of referrals – professionals from both Centres for Social Work. The training was conducted by Rob van Pagee and Marc Rakers, trainers from the organisation "Eigen Kracht Centrale" from the Netherlands and Zeljka Burgund on behalf of the organisation "Within the family" from Belgrade, Serbia.

Out of respect for the principle of neutrality, the organisation of the family group conferences cannot be conducted by the institutions of public interest, therefore it was decided that the model would be developed as a project activity of the civil society in partnership with the public sector (social welfare centres, schools, etc.). In 2011 the “In foundation” BiH and Foundation “Kinderpostzegels” the Netherlands decided to support the pilot project of the model in Sarajevo and Banja Luka. For the implementation of the project and providing the family group conference service a newly established Association "Family Network" from Banja Luka was responsible. In the first year of the project there were 23 pilot family group conferences in both local communities, and the project was completed in June 2015, with over 100 realised conferences.

Inspired by the positive outcomes which the conferences achieved in the field of providing support to children and families living in crisis situations, at the beginning of 2014 the “In foundation” decided to continue with the expansion of the model in new local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina within the framework of its programme action. On the basis of the observed social needs of the community and the interests to establish new services in partnership of public and non-governmental sector in the field of social welfare, the replication of the model was supported in the area of Mostar, Zenica and Bijeljina. Three newly selected civil society partner organisations that were supported with grants by the “In foundation” and the Foundation "Kinderpostzegels" from the Netherlands for developing the model – project during the three-year cycle were the humanitarian organisation "Altruist" from Mostar, Association "Our children"
from Zenica and Association "Family circle" from Bijeljina. In addition to the supported CSOs the social welfare centres from the abovementioned local authority units were also included in the implementation of the project. A group of 30 new independent coordinators, project managers and seven professionals from the Centres for Social Work in Mostar, Zenica and Bijeljina attended specially organised three-day training program organised by the “In foundation”, which was carried out by the representatives of the Association "In the Family Circle" from Serbia, Belgrade. After the training, in June 2014 the implementation of the model began and the development of the service in selected communities.

In order to strengthen the local capacity for training of professionals in the social welfare institutions and members of the civil society organisations working in the field of protection of children and families, the “In foundation” organised a training of trainers for gaining specific training skills and knowledge transfer through the training programme for the FGC in January 2016.

In December 2015 “In foundation” decided to assess the capacity and interest of new local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to replicate and implement a pilot project of the mentioned service in work with children and families at risk. After the assessment of potentially interested civil society organisations and centres for social work, in May 2016, the projects in the three-year cycle began with the implementation in the area of Tuzla, Bihac and Gradiska. Three new CSOs became partners of the “In foundation” and the foundation ""Kinderpostzegels" from the Netherlands to develop the family group conferences in the mentioned communities: Association "Amica Educa" Tuzla, Association "Women from the Una river" from Bihac and the Association "Most" from Gradiska. Additionally, the local centres for social work got involved in the model developing project implementation. 21 persons who had gone through the selection process for the independent coordinators, project managers from the three listed partner organisations, as well as 8 professional workers from the centres for social work in the field of the three municipalities underwent certified training and acquired knowledge and additional skills for initiating a referral and organising family group conferences in their local communities.

During the period from 2011 to 2016 over 175 family group conferences were conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the area of 8 municipalities, with the participation of 315 children, children and youth at risk, and more than 1,300 members of the family and social networks, who came to the conferences to support the families. Representatives of seven civil society organisations as well as the 8 centres for social work have developed professional competence and knowledge, and gained considerable experience in providing new types of services in the field of supporting children, young people and families at risk.

In the course of establishing a model at the Bosnia and Herzegovina level, in cooperation with the Foundation “Kinderpostzegels” the Netherlands and local partner organisations of the civil society the following programme elements have been developed: the process of standardizing the organisation of conferences; the establishment of formal forms of cooperation between the civil society organisations - holder of the project and the centre for social work: design, implementation and monitoring through the documentation forms and working with families; professional support, as well as ways of internal monitoring and evaluation of the work in the
application of the model. A memorandum of partnership/collaboration between the civil society organisations, which is the holder of the supported project, and the local social welfare centre was signed at the beginning of the project. A model of reporting on the assessment of the beneficiaries’ satisfaction with the service provided and the participation in the conference was also agreed. The posters and pamphlets that provide the information about the model to the interested families and the general public were printed. An informal network of organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina was developed, which provide a service of the FGC with the system of sharing knowledge, experiences and lessons learned in implementing the model as a goal.

The first public presentation of the achievements in the development of this modern model of family support in Bosnia and Herzegovina intended for the experts-professionals in the field of child and social protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was carried out in June 2015 in Sarajevo. On this occasion, the attendees got better acquainted with the working principles of the model and the way to develop this innovative service in the system of child and social protection, which is oriented to the strength of the family.

Since 2012, “In foundation” and its supported local partner organisations represent Bosnia and Herzegovina as members of the European Network of the organisations that develop and apply a model of the family group conferences. With a goal to equalise the models with European standards, representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the annual meetings of the European network which were organised in Sweden in 2012, Italy in 2014 and in the UK in 2015.

In November 2015, at the invitation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Czech government, the programme officers of the “In foundation” took part in a national conference on the development of the family group conferencing in the context of the reform of the child protection in the Czech Republic, and on this occasion the representatives of ministries, local administrative services and civil society were presented with the experiences and lessons learned in developing this model and services in BiH.

In early October 2016, a public symposium entitled “Family Group Conference - modern model of support to family at risk” was organised in Sarajevo by the “In foundation” and financed by the foundation “Kinderpostzegels” the Netherlands, with the goal to show the intermediate results in the implementation of the model in BiH, but also to map the proposals for the integration of the model in the children’s and social protection systems in BiH. The event was attended by over 40 representatives of relevant ministries, local authorities, social welfare centres, the academic community from the department of social work, and NGO representatives, and they were able to also find out more about the experiences of the application of this model in the child protection in the Netherlands, which was presented by Dutch experts.

“In foundation” seeks the opportunity to share the knowledge and lessons learned in the development of modern concepts of the family conferences in BiH shared. By organising joint intervision and supervision meetings with the representatives of partner organisations and participating centres for social work, the methodological and practical issues related to the development and implementation of the model are being established.
Furthermore, by participation in the annual meetings of the European network of countries that apply this model in the child protection system, there is significant contribution to the equalisation and standardisation of the Family group conference model and service in BiH in accordance with the European standards.

A contribution to the so far capacity building activities for the application of this model is also provided by organising the three-day annual meeting of the European FGC network organised by “In foundation” from the October 5th to 7th 2016, in Sarajevo. The meeting was attended by 50 members of the network from 12 European countries that implement this model into the child protection system. This was also a good opportunity for the representatives of the supported civil society partner organisations at the BiH level to exchange their experiences with the members of the European network and gain new knowledge related to the development of this model.
2. ASSESSMENT OF THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE PROGRAMME IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

4.3. Methodology

The “In foundation” – a foundation for promoting social inclusion of children and young people in BiH established the scope of the evaluation of the "Family Group Conference" programme which has been implemented from 2011 to 2018 with the financial support of the Foundation "Kinderpostzegels" from the Netherlands.

The assessment was conducted from June 1st to July 31st, 2016. The process of assessment of the programme was conducted by the INF programme staff, with the aim of assessing the process of implementation of the programme, the impact that the programme has on the target group (families at risk) and benefit that was realized by the usage of the programme in the field of non-institutional development and innovative services in the social sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The evaluators are very familiar with the programme, organisational culture and goals. They are also experienced in conducting evaluations, and a good cooperation with relevant partner organisations has been established, which allowed better access to information and data relevant for the implementation of the evaluation.

The scope and extent of evaluation with regard to the available resources were limited and included the following methods:

→ review and analysis, and selection of key materials and documents arising from the implementation of program activities;
→ analysis of the reporting and other supporting project documents (reports on the progress of the project, reports from the training courses, conclusions from the intervision meetings);
→ semi-structured interviews and focus groups that were conducted in Mostar, Zenica and Bijeljina with the representatives of the social welfare centres (8 participants), independent coordinators (12 participants) and family members (20 participants);
→ analysis of the secondary statistical data is based on 159 family group conferences implemented in BiH, information gathered by the four partner organisations of the “In foundation” (the source of the collected data: the files of families, form for initiating FGC, a plan made by the family, monitoring the implementation of the plan after 3 months, completed questionnaires on beneficiaries' satisfaction with the service provided, quarterly reports on the progress of the project);
→ formulation of the conclusions and recommendations were defined based on the analysis and evaluation of key project documents and interviews conducted with the key stakeholders.
4.4. Assessment results

4.4.1. Data collected by the independent coordinator

Analysis of secondary data is based on evaluation of 159 completed family group conference in BiH.

Chart 1: The reasons for referring FGC

According to collected data, the most common reasons for initiating FGC are:

- divorce of parents (17.6%)
- problems associated with their school assignments (17.6%),
- family problems, such as addiction diseases, mental diseases and the developmental disabilities in the 14.7% of the cases,
- and disrupted family relationships (14.7%).
Evaluation of the success of implementation of the family plan was carried out by the independent coordinators according to the Likert estimation scale from 1 to 5. The data indicated that the implementation of the plan was estimated as very successful for all of these reasons for initiating the FGC or types of problems. However, it is noted that there is weaker realisation of the family plan with families where the violence against children was present (average grade performance is 3.00), while the most successful implementations were in support of single parents (5.00). However, this information can also depend on smaller number of initiated cases of violence against children in relation to other types of problems that were more often resolved through the family group conferences, which should be further explored.
As it can be seen in Chart 3., the most numerous participants at the held conferences are close relatives of the child / young person that conference was initiated for (38.7%). This percentage is expected due to the substance of the family group conference where the participation of the highest possible number of close members of the family network is expected in resolving the crisis situations or problems, because they are an important factor in supporting and finding solutions for the problem of the family. The analysis confirmed more frequent involvement and the presence of the fathers in the family group conferences, which is not often the case in some other services.

Chart 4: The duration of conferences

The initiated conference were in most cases (40.7%) lasting 2-3 hours, a slightly smaller percentage of them (35.2%) lasted from 1.5 to 2 hours. There were no cases in which a family group conference lasted more than 4 hours.
The children or young people, for which the conferences were organised are of different ages, and the range of their years is extending from 2 to 21, and the average age is 11. Most children/young people present at the conferences were 8 years old (10.7%), 10 years (8.7%) and 17 years (10.7%).

More boys / young men, 52.6% participated at the conferences, while there were 47.6% girls / young women (Chart 6).
The total number of initiated, but not realised FGC in BiH was 15. The reasons mentioned were:

- zero or insufficient response from important members of family network
- distrust in the non-institutional problem solving,
- unwillingness of families to engage in joint problem solving,
- the impossibility of establishing a dialogue between the opposing sides,
- unwillingness to accept new models.

### 2.2.2. Data collected three months after the FGC was held by family members

**Chart 7: Satisfaction with FGC**

Three months after the FGC was held, the participating members of the family declare in the highest percentage that they are satisfied with the held FGC (85%), while much lower percentage is partially satisfied (14.6%), and a very low percentage of the participants is dissatisfied (0.4%).

**Chart 8: Respecting the plan adopted at the conference**

The adopted family plan in a high percentage of cases was respected, as estimated by the beneficiaries (71.7%). A somewhat lower percentage of the approved plans was partly realised (25.5%), while there is a very low number of those with significant discrepancies recorded (2.8%).
Most beneficiaries of this model (79.6%) evaluate the success of the approved plan with very high grades (4 and 5), while very few of them consider the plan adopted at the conference in their case had very little or no success and (3.7%).

The beneficiaries of the FGC model are mostly satisfied with the cooperation with the representatives of the Centre for social work (88.3%), while only a very small number of the beneficiaries are dissatisfied with this cooperation (0.8%).
In most cases there was no change of the adopted family plan (66.8%), while in 21.5% of them there were minor, and in 11.7% there were significant changes of them. The independent coordinator and case manager at the centre were informed promptly about the need to change of the plan. The reason is most often linked to the inability of the member of the family networks to comply with the implementation of the commitments or the need to postpone the implementation of the same, due to certain difficulties (going on a trip, relocation, illness, etc.).

Three months after holding the family group conference, 24.7% of the involved families noticed a moderate improvement in family relationships, 39.4% assessed that the progress in the field of family relations is noticeable and even 28.1% of the families reported about a very positive change.
31.2% of the families that were included in the FGC model already recommended this model to other people/families in solving their problems, while another 38.1% intends to suggest it to some of his acquaintances who are in the state of need.

2.2.3. Data collected from children/young people shortly after the FGC

Shortly after the held family group conference, the largest number of children/young people, the beneficiaries of the FGC model, evaluate this model with the highest grades 4 and 5 (86.4%) in the estimation scale from 1-5.
The largest number of children/young people felt comfortable during the conference (74.5%, Graph 16). Furthermore, most of them (85.5%) had the feeling that the others listened to them during the conference (Chart 17).

Adopted family plan was evaluated as very good or excellent (Chart 18) by most of the children/young people (95.4%).
2.3. Analysis of semi-structured interviews

2.3.1. The application of family group conference in dealing with a family and family network

The point of the family group conference is participation of as many as possible caring members of the family network in resolving crisis situations or problems. However, the first impressions of service users in social welfare centres are characterised with scepticism after being offered the possibility to try to solve a part of the problem through this model. The biggest challenge is the phase when they need to identify potential persons from their family or social networks that should be invited to the conference. Most often in their first contact with the initiator, they point out that they do not have anyone close they could invite to the family meeting or often they do not want to inform others about the problem, and therefore sometimes they are not ready to make a decision on the organisation of the conference immediately. It has been observed that the families find it difficult to get together because the families at risk are often isolated and marginalized, and because of the cultural pattern, and social alienation they hide their problems and do not have the habit of reaching solutions through communication. However, when they gather, they then recognize their power and are able to mobilize their resources and find solutions to a problem with the help of their relatives.

One of the main challenges identified by the independent coordinators and initiators-representatives of the social welfare centres in the implementation of the project of the family group conference in BiH is giving up of a small number of families from the suggested and prepared conferences. This is something that regularly happens in practice of applying the model and such a situation should not be seen as negative since there may be various reasons for the decision they made. Often, the problem may be poor promotion of the model, lack of motivation for a change by the target families, not believing in their own capacities and failure to recognize the resources for a change, a family resistance as a result of fear of something new and different and unwillingness to inform the kinship and social networks about the problem or about solving it. The experience has shown that the families which gave up at one point of the conference decide to contact the social welfare centre at some later point with a request to try to organise the conference again.

The initial users’ expectations of the new service are different, from the optimistic forecasts to the fact that the service is accepted only to meet the “requirements” of the institution or not to question social right benefits if they refuse the proposal for a conference by the initiator-case manager from the welfare centre. Out of the total number of the initiated conferences from the three involved social welfare centres, 80% of the conferences were completely realised.
A welfare officer, S.K., explains, from the perspective of the initiator, the selection of the families, for which the family group conference would be organised:

“When choosing a family for a conference, I choose the one in which I see that there is something that is "missing a little bit" in order to have an improvement or bring it in order in their case, to bridge a problem, especially if I see that they have the resources and the people who might help them, but they alone are not powerful to bring all this people into one place. Also, I choose easier cases. When proposing the conference to the client, we try to present the possibilities to which the conference may lead to and then ask for their consent. It is because that is the only way we can make them to cooperate and to easier identify the others that should be invited.”

In order to decide to participate in the conference, the interviewed people who took the role of the representatives of social networks at the conferences listed a few kinds of information that were important at the time when they were contacted by the initiator or an independent coordinator. Primarily, it was important to get adequate information on what the model implies exactly and what their role would be at the meeting. It was also important for them to know the problem of the family in a nutshell and the objective of gathering, as well as to assess how they can help the family. All of the interviewed people confirmed they could ask questions during the conference and to express their opinions and participate in the conversation, mainly because of the atmosphere of openness and because the majority of the participants have known each other, as well as the willingness of the independent coordinator and provider of information to answer any participants’ question.

Family members’ ways of support are diverse, from the presence at the conference when the problem is being solved, through their contribution to the planning of chosen solution, up to taking full responsibility for a certain part of the chosen solution. In several cases, the participation at the conference of the relatives who live abroad was provided via Skype calls, e-mail or a letter of support.

By analysing the phases of the conference, both service users and the independent coordinators have identified a phase called a "family time" as the biggest challenge in providing the service. At this stage, the family is left alone with the representatives of its network to discuss the identified challenges and opportunities and make the independent decisions in relation to the solutions of the problem without the influence and interference of the professionals from the social welfare centre, independent coordinator, or other systems. They decide as a group about the best way to respond to the problem, which actions are to be taken and who is going to take over certain roles and tasks. After that the family plan, which contains deadlines and executors of specific tasks is created. The family members often expect the independent coordinator to get involved and somehow additionally “intervene” in order to initiate discussion or lead it to the right direction because they do not know how to communicate as a group or they have lost the capacity for negotiation. The independent coordinators have the knowledge and skills to stay neutral in these situations and manage to focus the whole process on the family and get them to interact with each other. A general assessment of the interviewed families is that they did not expect that an adequate plan could be created and that the implementation plan could be successfully implemented with the support of other important individuals from their close environment.
In the opinion of an independent coordinator, I.R., the support provided at the conference is somehow motivating for the beneficiaries or the family in terms of looking at problems from different perspectives and obtaining additional power to endure the changes. She adds the following statement:

"I believe that the beneficiaries, even when coming home after the conference, find a thousand other solutions and that we only give them incentive for that. It is because they come helpless and all is black and suddenly they see dear familiar faces, ready to help them somewhere, so the energy returns and some new horizons and hopes open up and then they return home with a new faith that change is really possible and that is really going to happen."

After the conference and the implementation of the defined plan in practice, the interviewed families stated that they felt the improvement in communication and relationships within the family as well as with the extended family network. The intensity of the conflict has been reduced and a better understanding of the difficulties and finding effective solutions to problems has been also noted. The most important message, sent through this model, is that an individual is not alone and that he/she can find solutions for his/her problems with the support. In this way, the individual gets back his/her power and control to manage his/her life.

The assessment of the interviewed welfare officers and independent coordinators is that the realisation of the family plan is mostly successful in solving problems which are defined at the conference, bearing in mind that there are certain circumstances (business trip, illness, surgery, moving), which prevent some individual members of the family network to respond fully to the commitments and the implementation of these family plans must be delayed. It is estimated that out of the total number of the defined family plans, 75% to 100% of them are implemented in practice out of situations established and defined by the plan.

It is also positive that the program in Bosnia and Herzegovina also established regular assessment of the users’ satisfaction with the service provided. Upon the completion of each of the conferences, the participants complete the questionnaires for the children and young people as well as the questionnaires for adults which enabled getting a clearer picture on their experiences in relation to the service provided. The collected feedback helps in having clearer overview of the model developing from the perspective of users and if needed to have the model adapted to the cultural context. The questionnaires are used to assess the users’ expectations, mode of informing about the model, conference evaluation, satisfaction with the defined plan, as well as other comments and suggestions. Just on the basis of the assessment there was a proposal adopted to engage independent coordinators in order to strengthen the implementation of the family plan following it a month after the conference, and further after the second month, in order to pay attention to possible changes in the plan and to additionally strengthen the implementation of the plan if necessary. Primarily, the implemented family conferences justified the expectations of the users in terms of getting additional support from family and social networks developing and strengthening the family-social networks-institutions of the system relations.
It is also important for the users that the independent coordinators monitor the implementation of the plan after the conference because it assures them that they can get support if they face any difficulties or challenges.

2.3.2. Initiator-Social Welfare Centre’s experiences in initiating families for the family group conferences

A family group conference is offered by the initiator (professional) who has successfully passed the training program for initiating conferences. In the context of BiH, the initiators are employees of social welfare centres / case managers, but certainly they could also be, if necessary, the representatives of a school, the representatives of other institutions that belong to the system of social welfare, health, justice and so on. The initiators attend certified training and acquire knowledge and additional skills for initiating and organising family group conferences in their local communities. Previous experience of the representatives of social welfare centres as the initiators of conferences indicates that this model helps to solve less complex problems or a segment of more complex problems for users of the social welfare system. At the same time, a welfare officer V.M. emphasizes that the other capacities that an individual and family have, are also significant for the change in order to have successful organisational preparation and more lasting effects of the conference:

"I have initiated a lot of conferences regarding the problems with children, such as: Not attending school or anti-social behaviour of children; some poor background at home; the overload of one parent, who takes care of the family and so on. Family group conferences provide the best results when the family members have a communication problem and when the family still has the capacity and the desire to stay together because the users or members of the family often have hard attitudes and are not able to make adequate contact and talk until someone brings them together at the table. Or, when some things are incomplete, unfinished, but they need someone to support them to get things resolved."

By participating in conferences in the role of case managers or providers of information, the social welfare officials get to know each other better and overview the family dynamics of its users and to get in touch with members of the family network, which can be significant agents of a change in the family: The family life perspective turns back, as well as the sense of power to solve problems and manage their lives; the feeling of helplessness reduces which significantly facilitates the conduct of professional dealing with an identified family case. As an advantage of this model, the representatives of social welfare centres also stress a good opportunity to improve institutional cooperation and communication with representatives of other institutions in the community that appear at the conferences in the role of the wider family network or as providers of information, which is specifically described by the welfare officer S.K.:

„My experience shows that the support of school and some non-governmental organisations that can make its contribution is very important in terms of control and the introduction of some extra-curricular, extra activities. The welfare officers in schools have shown great interest to be involved in the family group conferences
and it is very commendable. Thanks to these conferences, we even established additional contacts with the schools; we as a Centre, in the sense that we hear each other from time to time to talk about the new cases. Lately, we have had good cooperation with a Roma nongovernmental organisation, whose members participated in conferences in the role of providers of information or as a part of the social network of the family for which the conference was held and it gave results and opened up some new models of support and set up a new cooperation. “

Although the conferences mainly resolve a clearly defined central question (problem), the experience has shown that the central family issue may not always be the main issue. It seems that solving one problem initiates chain solving of other problems of an individual or a family, supported by the new resources at their disposal. This perception was precisely described by the welfare officer N.E., who listed the benefits that the model provides in dealing with the users of the service within the social welfare system:

“We have a case of a juvenile I.B. Besides the close relatives at the conference, there were also friends of his late mother and father, who responded and have expressed a wish to help. The conferences resulted with several great things for the child; he returned to the school, passed the supplemental exams, continued regular education, the apartment is furnished and put in order, and he alone presented all problems he was facing throughout his life .... The problem is better focused through the conference, and everybody takes their share of tasks in order to solve the problem. Thus, one problem that is identified at the conference helps solving many other current issues through this meeting. We were not even aware of how many problems we solved during that one conference. For the two hours that we stayed at the conference there were more things solved than we could even have predicted. “

However, the social welfare experts admit to being a little careful when initiating families for this type of service. Some families they contact professionally and that meet the criteria of "families in crisis" do not always have the capacity to complete a conference to the end. One of the problems is their "poor" or scarce social networks. Then there is the lack of confidence in the non-institutional support, as well as the reluctance of families to engage in joint problem solving.

In their opinion, the most important thing is to allocate sufficient time in terms of adequate preparation and assessment of whether the family conference can be beneficial. They also agree that there are no prioritized or less priority cases and that it should not be limited with some statement that the model was more successful at an early stage, rather than at a later stage of the existence of the problem. The title of the conference gives the opportunity in each segment of application, i.e. provides a variety of the action, and the model is defined so that it cannot harm the family. Even when you think that everything is written off, a family can come to the phase of changes due to the conference. To date, each of the family group conferences resulted in a family plan. Even those families that had the least confidence in themselves, have accepted the proposal to hold a conference as a one more attempt, which will take them nowhere, but they still managed to define a plan for solving the problem.

Although it is a model that is yet to find its way in terms of integration into the practice of social and child protection in BiH, unregulated formal legal status of the model sometimes makes it difficult for the social welfare experts to initiate a larger number of conferences than defined by the project.
Due to limited resources only a small number of the initiators from the involved social welfare centres are trained, it is necessary to train a larger number of associates in order to improve their professional competence for the application of this model in practice, and in that way achieve greater interest of families for this model. Since that the project does not provide compensation for the engagement of associates as conference initiators due to limited financial resources, it is also evident their lack of motivation to initiate conferences, especially at the beginning of the project. However, very quickly after presenting first results and when they see that the model works in practice, the initiators change their opinion because they come to realize that the new approach helps them and makes it easier dealing with service users.

2.3.3. The experience of independent coordinators in the implementation of the model

The role of independent coordinators in this process is specific. These people are independent in their work, and are not in the service of any institution that has a right to make decisions regarding the family. They are qualified to organise and conduct FGC proposed by a project coordinator and after the consent from the family, they are selected to implement the conference. They pledge professional and impartial treatment, without judging any aspect of life or user’s behaviour, confidentiality and the family’s data safe-keeping, which is what an independent coordinator D.P. is telling us about:

"Each conference is different. You can never say that everything will be done according to the same pattern. The formulaic work is not possible ... I think that we, the independent coordinators, have a very fine job and a role since everything is realised outside the institution and we do not come into contact with the user through a "judgmental" attitude, since a user can have a similar experience through contacts with representatives of the public services, so our neutral role can only contribute to win an individual or family over for a further cooperation. The longer we work with a family in a form of preparation the possibility of opening up or confiding in us by an individual or a family is more likely to happen..."

All engaged independent coordinators are required to sign a statement on data protection and equitable treatment in the implementation of the model. In so doing, they commit themselves to the high standards of professional performance and ethical behaviour for the time of their engagement on a project; they will enforce the protection of client’s data in accordance with applicable legislation, and that they will maintain this responsibility while storing and disposing of the client’s information, particularly the information regarding their sensitive situations collected during the preparation and implementation of the family group conference.

The crucial elements which lead to a positive outcome from the conference, according to some independent coordinators, are the abilities of families to reach an agreement. Since this is a new service provided for users of social protection, very often, in addition to the initial contact made with the interested family over the phone, independent coordinators estimate that it is necessary to realise and direct contact through home visits. This achieves greater success in persuading families to cooperate and in betterment of their understanding of the characteristics of the model.
In order to somehow facilitate the organisation and technical implementation of the model in practice, and to prevent the possibility of "deepening" the inclusion of independent coordinator in issues of family (which is not supported by methodological principles of the model), it is recommended to introduce those families who come forward with the problem at an early stage of its development. This means that one should avoid making referrals of families with whose social welfare centres have been operating for many years, as a last solution for long-standing crisis situation, although minor improvements can certainly be noticed when dealing with the category of families who are long-time users of the social protection.

It would be desirable for members of the family and the social networks who are invited to participate in the conference to be open to a new approach to solving the problem. However, domestic and international experience from conducting conferences has shown that relatives or members of social networks, who have previously confirmed their attendance, often do not attend family meetings. It is assumed that there is a fear of something new; fear that they would be expected to provide more commitments in the form of financial support to families for which the meeting is organised, and that kinship ties are rather weak. This problem should be alleviated through better preparation of network members, by having them thoroughly informed and by raising awareness about the necessity for participation in the meeting in the interest of the child and the family / families. In the preliminary phase, whilst in contact with the child and his parents, it is necessary to identify as many potential members of the network, in order to prevent the failure to define an efficient plan to resolve the problem, due to non-attendance of some members of the network. Independent coordinators have established the fact that conferences are better organised when they solve the problem arising around "one" person and it is very important that the focus, when convening a family meeting, is on a child because; usually, everyone would aspire to help and protect a child. In essence, this is perhaps the key to successful inclusion of members of the extended family social network and for their response and cooperation.

Independent coordinators emphasise that it would be desirable to carry out a broader campaign and inform the public about the model and its capabilities, as it would gain support of the family, relatives, and other potential representatives from the community to improve co-operation organising family meetings.

When in contact with families, independent coordinators strive to comply with the principle of neutrality; however, when a conference is held it is not uncommon for families sometimes to try and "involve" them in solving their problems. Such or similar challenges and dilemmas can be successfully overcome through internal intervision meetings which are part of the project's components, as well as external intervision meeting which is supported and implemented at national level. The intervision meetings regularly gather involved independent coordinators, project managers and professional staff of the social welfare centre. This helps significantly in overcoming the difficulties which they face when realising projects and implementing the model in practice. Experience shows that independent coordinators significantly improved their skills in identification of problems, establishment of relationships with vulnerable categories of users, communication and presentation skills, meetings organisation, adaptation skills, as well as development of cooperation and partnership.
One of the biggest challenges that has been identified comes from the withdrawal of involved trained independent coordinators, in most cases this is due to the small number of conferences held during the year, resulting in loss of motivation, finding a job, lack of time, etc. An independent coordinator is essentially a volunteer, but because of the contractual relationship (which is binding to the content and tasks) it is necessary to account for the time spent/work of an independent coordinator, hence compensation is provided by the project.

### 2.3.4. Applicability of the FGC in practice

The model of the family group conference, as an innovative methodology to support the family, is applied in Bosnia in numerous cases in which children and young people are at risk of violence, neglect, poverty, social exclusion. This includes situations where disease or other problems hinder efficiency of carrying out the parenting role. These can jeopardise the best interests of children and young people, and the ability to meet their requirements in the family. When it comes to the application of the model in cases of divorce, there is a dilemma of whether and when to initiate conference for this type of problem. The experience of a social worker V.M. certainly gives a new perspective in relation to the expert assessment of the adequacy of this model for the specified type of problem:

"... We have never initiated a family group conference and before that we did not previously have spent at least one attempt at conciliation. If we feel that there's something unharmed in their relationship or if they mention some important people who could help them, then the conference can be proposed as an additional option ... When it comes to partners in the process of divorce, I find the message that this method sends away a very significant one, and that is "It is up to you! So, you are the ones who have the power." Very often in divorce the proceedings partners rely on us and our services too much, because we are perceived as a service which needs to solve their problems. When all options are exhausted and they are referred to a family group conference, they face the fact that there are no employees from the centre, no judge, no lawyer, but only two of them, with their children and their network. So, the message perceived is that tensions will calm down and a solution will be found or the chaos will be continued. The focus is then shifted on the children, in order to a little bit refocus the perspective from the partners’ on to the parental duties and responsibilities and the needs of their children ... "

Representatives of social welfare centres point out amongst other things that the model, proved to be very applicable in situations where there is a high risk that a child or a juvenile is likely to repeat maladaptive and antisocial behaviour and to violate the law. In accordance with new legal provisions in the field of justice programs for juveniles who are in conflict with the law in BiH, the interviewees agree that we should find a way to integrate this model to the application of the criminal law for minors in FBiH and RS, as part of the alternative measures and educational recommendations. Therefore, it would be necessary to further educate and inform social workers, judges and prosecutors of juveniles about the possibilities that this model can provide, to the practice of restorative justice. A special retrospection regarding the application of the model is given by a social worker whose work is related to protection of minor children:
“When I initiated the first conference I thought that there would not be even two people attending the meeting, but I was a little surprised at how many people showed up because the conference was held at 17 pm. These conferences, the ones for protection of the minors especially, were very well attended and we have good results. In our opinion the organised conferences have been more helpful to the clients and the local community than the centre for social welfare itself. For me the most important is the right of the family reunification... The President of the Court was invited to attend one of the conferences, and she accepted the invitation, but she very much doubted the efficiency of the model. After her participation at the conference, she was thrilled with it. She needed quite a bit of time to be able to speak about it...”

To respond to the needs of children in the most efficient and the effective way, the majority of the interviewed independent coordinators believe that this model should be applied in schools, with the aim of early intervention. The staff in schools could play a role of potential initiators, as they are able to recognise a change in behaviour among children and youth at an early stage. During the implementation of the conference in BiH a few specialists, and classroom teachers who had the opportunity to attend conferences organised and held in support of the minors, recognised the importance and the role of this model in terms of providing early intervention and prevention of juvenile problems in educational system. Schools participation at conferences offers great opportunities for representatives of schools to be better informed on the socio-economic and family circumstances of their students, and to establish closer cooperation with the centre for social welfare and the local community.

All interviewed social workers and independent coordinators agree that the model is ideal for schools and that it supports early intervention. Some of the dilemmas that arise are primarily related to the openness of schools, to new initiatives from outside, and practical issues related to obtaining the consent of parents, or the ministry of education of pedagogical institutes, so the model could be implemented in coordination with the education system.

2.3.5. The partnership of public and non-governmental sectors in developing the services of the family group conference

We were interested in opinion about the success of this cooperation, because since the beginning of implementation this pilot project, this model has been developing in BiH in close partnership cooperation between the civil society organisations which deliver the project and the centre for social welfare which are partners. A mutual assessment of representatives from social welfare centres identifies benefit from the conduct of projects through civil society organisations, achieved by the application of the principle of neutrality and non-institutional support emphasised in this model. An important factor to success is the selection of adequate and good quality civil society organisation as the lead partner. Representatives of social welfare centres in Mostar, Bijeljina and Zenica, have supported the elected CSOs and evaluating the cooperation and the implementation of the project and models as remarkable. When selecting CSO, the “In foundation” paid much attention to making a detailed assessment of their capabilities, the experience, and reputation of the organisation in the community, as well as the relationship with the centre for social welfare.
The officials noted that the selected organisations have significant experience in the development and provision of social services; have established good quality cooperation with the centre for social welfare and other institutions at the local level, and have certain credibility and are recognised within the community. Managers at NGOs who are partners in the project state that developing this model has established a better cooperation with social welfare centres, as the communication with representatives of these institutions is a lot richer than it was before, which is a step forward towards building mutual trust and open space for development of additional capacity in the field of social services at the community level. In order to prevent occurrence of any irregularity in treatment, in addition to clearly established defined ways of communication regarding the initiation of cases between the centre for social welfare and selected CSOs, all engaged independent coordinators are required to sign a statement on data protection and equitable treatment, when implementing a project.
3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the modern model of support to children and families at risk, and in crisis has been developing for a relatively short period of time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the experiences of the parties involved in this process are more than positive and encouraging.

The process of transferring the model knowledge has evolved gradually through the careful evaluation and selection, piloting and testing, first in the area of Sarajevo and Banja Luka, and later, built on the achieved experiences and outcomes, in other local communities in BiH, including Mostar, Zenica, Bijeljina, Tuzla, Bihac and Gradiska. A significant contribution to the current activities in building capacities for the implementation of the family group conference model in BiH was provided by the “In foundation” and the Foundation "Kinderpostzegels" from the Netherlands, through project partnership with local civil society partner organisations and local social welfare centres. The model represents good practice experience, developed through the close cooperation between governmental and non-governmental sectors, willing to accept this novelty and test it in their local communities. The part-taking social welfare centre representatives, agreed in principle to test this novelty in their institutions, and to be directly involved in the initiating process within the families and model development. The potentials of this model primarily relate to the efficiency of services, wide range of application, and high percentage of positive outcomes of the models for children, youth and families at risk, empowering families to make decisions and participate in the changes’ development. It was established that the conferences do not only solve a single problem, and that solutions are found in chained-like manner for the other problems that a child, a young person or a family is facing. A family group conference model uses the family as a power source for problem solving, decision-making, but does not exclude the family in it. Members of the wider affiliation and a family social network also have an important role and are an important resource in supporting individuals and families at risk. The forms of support are various and range from the conference attendance when the problem is being solved, through to the solution's planning contributions, to taking specific responsibility for a certain part of the solution selected. Due to the atmosphere of openness, and because the majority of the participants know each other, as well as the willingness of an independent coordinator and information provider to answer any question from participants, this interesting model has found its way to the social and child welfare users in BiH.

A great number of family conferences organised, as well as the empowered and appreciative families that have been beneficiaries of these services, have indicated the need for implementation of the new model and approach to dealing with families, due to weak and irregular access to services aimed at families in local community, as well as limited financial resources and capacities of the existing services. Although, at the state level (BiH), the model has been developing primarily through the cooperation with the social welfare centres in order to innovate the family and social welfare, it has also been shown that this model could be applied within the education, health and justice sectors.
The development of this model has significantly improved the capacity of civil society organisations and social welfare centres in BiH by providing a new service by established partnership between the public and NGO sector, but also by applying the innovative approach in dealing with children, youth and families that face life crisis situations.

Community-based participatory design approach in the development of this model and service has been also achieved through the role of independent coordinators. These are trained and certified individuals selected from the community which are capable to facilitate the conferences in a neutral way. Since this group of people is not in the service of any institution that has a right to make decisions regarding the family, they are more capable to achieve neutrality in their work and additionally this gives a much greater possibility to children, youth and parents to be more involved in a decision making process, which is usually not the case in the child protection field in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Involved members of families in the assessment process showed a good acceptance of the role of independent coordinators when it comes to organising and managing conferences.

As a result of family arrangements, a family plan created for problems solving within the family support network, represents an innovation in dealing with families at risk. The plan establishes a structure, and at the same being particular, flexible and tailored in relation to the specificity and uniqueness of each family. To-date experiences states that the families are more than satisfied with the family plan application, and that most of the measures have been successfully implemented after conferences took place. Since the safety and legality of the plan is verified by the local social welfare centre, the same plan is applied by the case managers in the family law protection processes or in the cases of protecting rights and interests of children and families in the process.

The model also gives special attention to the perspective of a child, in the sense that children and young people are able to participate actively in the entire process and play an important role in initiation and implementation of conferences. At the same time, a child is given the right to be actively involved and that his/her best interests are primarily evaluated and considered in all actions or decisions affecting him/her. When organising conferences, primarily, it should be taken into account to allow the child to express his or her opinion, in accordance with his or her age and maturity, to participate in the various issues that concern him/her directly, and to find solutions that are in the best interests of the child. This model does not prevent a child that is young or is in a state of vulnerability to express his/her position, which is preceded by an individual assessment and determination of the specificities of the context, in order to provide adequate support. Most present children / youth at the conferences were at the age of 8, 10 and 17. The average age of the children who are the subject of the conference is 11. Most of the children who participated at the conferences evaluated the model very positively, expressing a sense of comfort for the duration of the meeting and the opportunity to have their opinions heard, and the adopted family plans were assessed as very good or excellent by the majority of the children / youth.
Possibilities of the model application in relation with the family issues are wide. The conferences in BiH that are initiated by the Centre for Social Welfare in most of the cases were related to cases / problems related to divorce, fulfilment of school obligations, family issues, such as the addiction disease, mental illness and developmental disabilities, and disturbed and dysfunctional family relations. An average duration of a conference is two to three hours, and the analysis confirmed involvement and presence of fathers at the family group conferences, which is not often the case in some other services.

Evaluating the success of the family plan implementation, the collected data indicate that the plan is successfully applied to all types of problems faced by children, youth and families at risk. However, weaker realization was found regarding the family plan with families involving violence against children, while the most successful implementation is regarding the support of single parents. However, this information can also depend on a small number of initiated cases of violence against children in relation to other types of problems that are often resolved through family group conferences. The adopted family plan, as estimated by the user, was successfully implemented in a large percentage of cases, while there are a very small number of plans in which there are significant discrepancies recorded. The reason is most often linked to the inability of an affiliated network member to comply with the implementation of the commitments or the need to postpone the implementation of the same, due to certain difficulties (trip, relocation, illness, surgery, etc.).

Three months after the family group conference was held, the big majority of families noted positive changes and improvements in family relationships and stress they would be happy to recommend this model to other people / families in solving their problems.

Potential obstacles in the model application are primarily reflected in resistance to accept innovations in dealing with children, youth and families at risk; some families that meet the criteria of the "families in crisis" do not always have the capacity to take a conference all the way to the end because of "poor" social networks. There is also a lack of confidence in the non-institutional support, as well as the reluctance of families to engage in joint problem solving. Occasional dropout of the trained independent coordinators, insufficient number of trained representatives of the social welfare centres to initiate conferences, unregulated formal legal status of the model and vague modalities of integration of the models / services in the practice of family and social welfare may also present a potential obstacle to the viability of this type of models and services in BiH.
Recommendations for the integration of Family group conference model and service in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- There are no legal obstacles for the use of the Family group conference (FGC) in the social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- It is recommended that a model of family group conferencing to integrate into local and/or cantonal strategic documents, policies and action plans for the improvement of the system of protection of children, young people and families (action plans for children, the strategy of the development of social inclusion, on strategies to combat violence against children, strategically targeting to work with children in conflict with the law, etc.)

- In the process of the reform of the social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina it would be important to promote the model FGC as non-institutional forms of support or as part of an expanded system of social services at the local level.

- By making the appropriate norms and standards, it would be important to ensure the standardisation of service-Family group conferences in the framework of the reform processes in the field of social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- For the system of social protection is also important to note that the model FGC is economical and requires little investment, while on the other hand, often reduces additional costs in regards to the involvement of professionals and representatives of institutions.

- To introduce the "Family group conferences" at academic study of social work, to young professionals who are prepared to work in the social and child protection already during their university education acquire basic information on the possibilities of the model in social work practice.

- It would be important to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the models at the academic level, which could take direct legal recommendations for the application of this model, in the case of positive findings.

- To conduct a wider general presentation of the model to experts and professionals working in relevant institutions at the local, cantonal and entity level in order to get familiar with the possibilities and advantages of the model (relevant ministries in the area of social, health, education, justice; municipal courts, cantonal prosecutor's offices, police stations, educational institutions, schools, municipal administrative services, community health centers, mental health centers, entity institutions that deal with social protection and inclusion of children, the study departments of social work, associations and unions of social workers, and non-governmental organizations).
In order to extend the number of trained and certified independent coordinators and professionals from Centers for Social Work in BiH, it would be necessary to organise additional trainings for these two targeted groups, as well as with groups of other professional associates with preschools and schools, health centres, non-governmental organisations and so on.

In order to promote FGC model within service users and the general population, it would be important to design and implement public awareness campaigns.

The Family plan to solve the problem is created and defined by family at a family group conference, and it is verified by the local Centre for Social Work. Welfare professionals agreed that the family plan as a valid document should be used in legal proceedings relating to family law and youth criminal act or from other public authorities when it comes to solving the issue of relations parents - children and protect the rights and interests of children and families in the process.

The model encourages the active participation of all family members, including children and youth who participate in family group conferences and they become important agents of change in their familiar surroundings. In that sense, there should be provided an opportunity for the family who has the contact with the welfare system to hold a family group conference before other measures being applied, to create a family plan and thus with the support of their social networks to try to solve the problem. In this way, by encouraging direct participation, the family members returning a sense of control and responsibility for their own lives, which reduces the sense of helplessness and further dependence on the social welfare system.

Throughout the conference, a better understanding of the difficulties is achieved by finding effective mechanisms to solve problems of families. Experience shows that after a conference held, communication and relationships within the family are improved, as well as with the wider family network, while conflicts among family members are significantly reduced.

The model represents the experience of a good practice that is being applied, tested and confirmed in the social and cultural context of BiH.

With its support activities so far in introducing social innovation, and capacity building for the use of PGK in BiH.

In Foundation has contributed significantly to the development, expansion, standardization, documentation, and quality assurance in the application of this model in BiH, by developing the system of training, intervison, professional technical support, the implementation and monitoring and evaluation models, and building up the capacities of local partners-civil society organisations and centres for social work for applying this innovative social model.

These recommendations should help the process of advocating for the integration of Family group conference model in the system of child and social protection in BiH, therefore, it will be forwarded to all relevant representatives of institutions that could help in the process.
4. Literature


