Foundations
What Works Centre for Children & Families

LOCAL AUTHORITY FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING DATA MONITORING

Project scoping note

Project delivery partners organisations	Coram Family Rights Group (FRG) Daybreak Data to Insight (D2I)
Lead project manager	Max Stanford, Head of Impact and Evaluation
Scoping note author(s)	Max Stanford
Type of project	Policy project
Timelines	January 2024 – 31 May 2024
Funder	Foundations – What Works for Centre for Children & Families

Summary

Foundations –What Works Centre for Children & Families (Foundations) has commissioned a policy project which will be undertaken by Coram, in partnership with Family Rights Group (FRG), Daybreak and Data to Insight (D2I). The project will explore what data on Family Group Conferencing (FGC) local authorities in England are currently collecting and what data monitoring systems they are using. The project team will develop recommendations on how FGC data, including at the pre-proceedings stage, could be routinely collected across England to provide a picture on which families have access to FGCs, and what their outcomes are. The FGC data Foundations is specifically interested in is whether families are offered an FGC at pre-proceedings, whether the offer is accepted, and what the outcomes are. This information is not currently available on a national level.

The key aims of this project are as follows:

1. To understand what data Local Authorities currently collect on FGCs at pre-proceeding stage specifically, and at other stages where relevant, and what data and monitoring systems they use.
2. To develop recommendations for how data could be routinely collected on family access to FGC at pre-proceedings (which should cover **how** as well as **who** should do this).

The project will begin in January 2024 and conclude by 31 May 2024. It will involve: consulting with parent/carer groups; conducting deep-dive site visits to three to four local authorities; interviews with stakeholders from local authorities, and with experts; as well as focus groups with parents/carers; and an assessment of other routinely collected data. These research activities will inform co-design workshops, which will be used to develop a set of options and recommendations for routine FGC data collection across England.

Background and problem statement

What are Family Group Conferences?

An FGC is a family-led decision-making approach used in children's social care in the UK and internationally. It involves a family-led meeting in which the family network come together to make a plan for a child who is at risk of harm or abuse. They are a voluntary process which allows a family and their network to draw on their strengths and resources to make a safe plan for a child/ren.[1] The process is supported by an independent coordinator who helps the family prepare for the FGC. Children are usually involved in their own FGC and are often supported by an advocate. FGCs originated in New Zealand in response to the large number of Maori children being removed into state institutions. They are now used in approximately 30 countries worldwide.

In the UK, FGCs are used in many areas of the child welfare system, including early help and preventative services, with children in care and care experienced children, and at the pre-proceedings stage, when local authorities consider applying to the Family Court to remove the child from their family to protect their welfare. FGCs are hypothesised to improve outcomes through several mechanisms, which include quicker processes, clearer information, more even power-sharing, drawing upon resources/support of wider family and greater trust between families and professionals.[2] There are typically five stages of an FGC: the referral; preparation; the conference; implementation of the plan; and review of the plan.[3]

What is the evidence base for FGCs?

There is a growing evidence base for the effectiveness of FGCs in the UK, particularly at pre-proceeding stage. In 2017, FGCs were evaluated as part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. Coram evaluated FGCs which were delivered by Daybreak, an FGC provider, in the London Borough of Southwark and Wiltshire County Council, and found promising outcomes for FGCs used at pre-proceedings stage.[4] Similarly, a 2017 evaluation of the Leeds Family Valued programme, which oversaw the expansion of FGCs to more families, including those affected by domestic violence, found reductions in court proceedings, as well as a reduction in the number of looked-after children, children in need, and Child Protection Plans.[5] The evaluation also reported that families who participated in FGCs felt more involved in the process and felt their values had been respected.

To build on this growing evidence base, Foundations published a report[6] in 2023 on the findings of the largest randomised controlled trial (RCT) of FGCs carried out in the world. The RCT was

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[1] Family Rights Group, "What is a Family Group Conference?" Available at: https://frg.org.uk/family-group-conferences/what-is-a-family-group-conference/
[2] Taylor, S. et al. (2023) Randomised controlled trial of Family Group Conferencing at pre-proceedings stage. Foundations.
[3] For more information, see Family Rights Group, https://frg.org.uk/family-group-conferences/what-is-a-family-group-conference/
[4] Munro, E. R., Meetoo, V., Quy, K. & Simon, A. (2017) Daybreak family group conferencing: children on the edge of care. Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Evaluation, report 54; Lawrence, H., Ludvigsen, A., Taylor, S. & Lovbakke, J. (2020) Family group conferences in pre-proceedings: evaluation report; Sebba, J., Luke, N., McNeish, D. & Rees, A. (2017) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme final evaluation report, report 58.
[5] Mason, P., Ferguson, H., Morris, K., Munton, T. & Sen, R. (2017) Leeds Family Valued evaluation report. Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Evaluation, report 43.
[6] Taylor, S. et al. (2023) Randomised controlled trial of Family Group Conferencing at pre-proceedings stage. Foundations.

undertaken by Coram, in partnership with Daybreak, and measured the impact of FGCs at pre-proceedings stage on child and parental outcomes. The study compared families referred for an FGC with families who were not referred. It found that children whose families were offered an FGC at pre-proceedings stage were less likely to go into care than those who were not, 12 months after entering pre-proceedings. Those who were offered an FGC and did spend time in care, spent six months less time following care proceedings than those that were not offered. FGCs at the pre-proceedings stage were also found to be cost-effective, by lowering the likelihood that children entering pre-proceedings would go into care. There have been less impact studies on FGCs at other stages of child welfare, such as early help or during family reunification when children leave care, however this does not mean that they are not effective at different points in the system. Additional research needs to be conducted to contribute to the existing evidence base.

What is the current policy on FGCs and their use?

The legal framework in England and Wales does not include a specific duty on local authorities to offer an FGC at a particular stage of work with a family. However, statutory guidance[7], which local authorities are required to act in accordance with, includes very clear messages which promote their use as not only one, but a particularly important, method of engaging the family network early. This guidance is included within the *Family and Friends Care* guidance (2011) and the *Court Orders and Pre-Proceedings* guidance (2014). Most recently, statutory guidance *Working Together* (2023)[8] has been updated to further promote the use of FGCs in local authorities to protect and promote the welfare of children. *Working Together* was recently strengthened to ensure more consistency across local authorities in this area and encourage earlier engagement with family networks following the Government's consultation response: *Stable Homes, Built on Love*. This report was in response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (MacAlister, 2022), which also recommended a new legal entitlement to family group decision-making before a case reaches the formal pre-proceedings stage. The President of the Family Division's Public Law Working Group report[9] also regards use of FGCs as "essential" at the formal pre-proceedings stage.

According to a 2022 survey by CASCADE, around 80% of local authorities in England have an FGC offer and around 90% of those offer FGCs at pre-proceedings stage.[10] This indicates that FGC is a widely used intervention in England.

Problem statement

Although widely used, there is no routinely collected data on the extent to which FGCs are offered and taken up, and there is limited national information on the use of FGCs at pre-proceeding stage. Local authorities do not have a standardised system or approach for capturing FGC data and there

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[7] This includes Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2011) [at paragraphs 4.34 – 4.35 and 4.37]. And Court orders and pre-proceedings for local authorities (2014) [paragraph 24].
[8] Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: A guide to multi agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children (2023).
[9] Public Law Working Group: Recommendations to achieve best practice in the child protection and family justice systems (March 2021) [at page 112, paragraph 19 (f)].
[11] There are various avenues and mechanisms that could be explored. Local authorities record a wealth of data in relation to their services, which includes mandatory data collections and data returns to DfE relating to children who are looked after by the local authority and children with a child in need plan or a child protection plan. At the end of 2023, DfE also published a data strategy that set out the long-term plan for transforming data in children's social care.

are various systems and methods for collecting data across children's services. Without a method for collecting high-quality data on the use of FGCs, it is not possible to know at a national level which families are being offered the service, which families accept, and what their outcomes are.

To address this information gap, this project seeks to understand what FGC data local authorities currently collect and how they record information on FGCs, particularly at the pre-proceedings stage. It will seek to understand the views of those working in local authorities with regards to data collection and the data that would be most useful to design, deliver, and improve FGC services. The project will also engage parents/carers on their experiences and perspectives and will examine the different possible mechanisms for collecting data on FGCs across England.[11] It will conclude by setting out options for a standardised, routine data collection process from local authorities on FGCs across England.

Project design and delivery

Aims

The key aims of this project are as follows:

- To understand what data Local Authorities currently collect on FGCs at pre-proceeding stage specifically, and at other stages where relevant, and what data and monitoring systems they use.
- To develop recommendations for how data could be routinely collected on family access to FGC at pre-proceedings (which should cover **how** as well as **who** should do this).

Key lines of inquiry

The key lines of inquiry for this project are set out below. A range of perspectives will be gathered for each line of enquiry, including but not limited to: expert academics; providers of FGCs; and multiple perspectives within local authorities, such as senior leaders, Heads of Services, Service Managers, FGC coordinators, social workers, as well as parents/carers themselves. This project is about what FGC data (including on family outcomes) is currently collected and how this data could be collected in a standardised, routine national data collection approach. This project is not looking at what constitutes a successful outcome for an FGC or aiming to advise on what outcomes should be collected. A longer, co-design project would be required to determine what constitutes a successful outcome for an FGC and would need input from families, providers, local areas and key stakeholders.

[11] There are various avenues and mechanisms that could be explored. Local authorities record a wealth of data in relation to their services, which includes mandatory data collections and data returns to DfE relating to children who are looked after by the local authority and children with a child in need plan or a child protection plan. At the end of 2023, DfE also published a data strategy that set out the long-term plan for transforming data in children's social care.

1. **What does current practice in local authorities look like regarding the recording and reporting of information on FGCs? What should it look like?**

The project will look at what information is recorded, how, and by whom, including the quality, frequency, and consistency of the data. It will also look at how data is reported on, to whom, and for what purpose. In addition, the project team will explore what data local authorities need to collect to design, deliver, and improve FGC services.

2. **What are the barriers and enablers for local authorities to collect and report on FGC data?**

The project will explore the barriers and enablers to standardised FGC data collection, which may relate to administration, costs, technical data skills, alignment with FGC principles, monitoring systems, and workplace culture.

3. **What are the mechanisms, barriers, and enablers to introducing a standardised, routine national data collection from local authorities on FGCs?**

The project will consider stakeholder perspectives on the existing mechanisms to collect and report on data in children's services. It will also consider how a national data collection could be co-designed with a range of stakeholders, including parents/carers.

Methodology

The project has a comprehensive methodology to answer the key lines of enquiry and to develop a robust set of insights and recommendations. The methods include an assessment of previous work on FGC data collection and an assessment of other relevant data collection processes. In-depth site visits to three to four local authorities will explore local authority data practices in relation to FGCs and will include interviews with senior leaders, FGC service managers, data leads and FGC coordinators. Additional interviews will take place with one or two stakeholders in a further pool of up to seven local authorities to understand a range of different perspectives from different contexts. Up to eight FGC providers, experts and academics will also be interviewed to gain perspectives outside of local authorities. Findings will be collated and fed into the co-design workshops, which will be attended by local authorities, experts, and parent/carers. Each of the methods used within this project are set out below.

1. **Assessment of previous work on FGC data collection**

There has already been some work to understand what data is recorded on FGCs. Several studies have also collected data on FGCs which can be used to assess what data is commonly collected and how, including the systematic review of shared decision-making meetings, [12] the CASCADE

[12] Nurmatov, U. B., Foster, C., Bezeczky, Z., Owen, J., El-Banna, A., Mann, M., Petrou, S., Kemp, A., Scourfield, J., Forrester, D. & Turley, R. (2020) Impact of shared decisionmaking meetings on children's out-of-home care, family empowerment and satisfaction: a systematic review. What Works for Children's Social Care and Cardiff University. http:// whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC_Shared_Decision-making_Family_ Meetings_systematic_review_Feb2020.pdf

research project,[13] Foundation's RCT on FGCs, and related studies funded by DfE, previous FGC evaluations,[14] academic papers, [15] and evaluations of local FGCs and FRG accreditation reports provided by local authorities. The project will begin with a scoping phase to review this information and conduct a rapid search of additional published material. A number of experts and academics in the field will also be consulted to help identify additional material to assess and inform the project's fieldwork.

2. Parent/carer panel

Family voice is the key driving force behind FGCs and is at the centre of planning and decision making. Therefore this project will include family perspectives on what data is collected on them and how, what data should be collected but is not currently, and what data is collected but should not be. An online meeting will take place at the start of the project with members from FRG's parents' and kinship care panels.[16] These participants are familiar with FGCs, and several will have participated in an FGC about their family members. At least one co-design session with this group will take place towards the end of the project to feedback the project findings and co-produce recommendations. The local authorities where the deep-dive visits will take place will also be encouraged to engage families they work with, including their parent/carer panels. Local authorities will determine how this will be achieved to align with how they currently embed family voice in their services.

3. Fieldwork with local authorities

A key part of the project will be to explore current FGC data practices in local authorities and to understand a range of perspectives about these practices from stakeholders within local authorities. To achieve this, the fieldwork will involve deep-dive site visits with a diverse group of three to four local authorities, and stakeholder interviews with a larger group of up to seven local authorities. A range of local authorities will be sampled to ensure diversity with regards to the:

- maturity of the FGC service
- current FGC delivery model: commissioned, in-house (integrated or independent team etc.)

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[13] Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre. Family VOICE: Family Group Conferencing for Children and Families. More information available at: https://cascadewales.org/research/family-group-conferencing-for-children-and-families-evaluation-of-implementation-context-and-effectiveness-family-voice/

[14] Rodger, J., Crosswaite, K., Turrell, H. & Elliott, S. (2020) Creating strong communities in North East Lincolnshire: a longitudinal evaluation. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933116/Longitudinal_-_ North_East_Lincolnshire.pdf; Sebba, J., Luke, N., McNeish, D. & Rees, A. (2017) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme final evaluation report, report 58. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/ government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/659110/Children_s_Social_Care_Innovation_Programme_-_Final_evaluation_report.pdf; Munro, R., Meetoo, V., Quy, K. & Simon, A. (2017) Daybreak family group conferencing: children on the edge of care. Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Evaluation, report 54. https://innovationcsc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/1.2.82-Daybreak_Family_Group_Conferencing.pdf; Mason, P., Ferguson, H., Morris, K., Munton, T. & Sen, R. (2017) Leeds Family Valued evaluation report. Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Evaluation, report 43. https://innovationcsc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/1.2.50-Leeds_Family_Valued_-_Evaluation_report.pdf; Lawrence, H., Ludvigsen, A., Taylor, S. & Lovbakke, J. (2020) Family group conferences in pre-proceedings: evaluation report. https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/follow-evaluationfamily-group-conferences-pre-proceedings-2020; FitzSimons, A. & McCracken, K. (2020) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme: round 2 final report. Department for Education. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/937041/Childrens_Social_Care_Innovation_Programme_Round_Final_Report.pdf

[15] Further reports can be found here: https://frg.org.uk/family-group-conferences/fgc-research/ and https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=847682

[16] See Parents' Forums, available at https://www.frg.org.uk/ParentsForum/.

- size of FGC service (number of staff) and number of FGCs per year
- demographic and geographical make-up (unitary/county council, metropolitan, rural, diverse demographics, numbers in care, CPP, CIN etc.)
- FGC data maturity and wider children's social care data maturity.

The sample will include a range of local authorities including FRG's National FGC and Lifelong Links Network (where c.70-100 FGC coordinators and managers attend quarterly national meetings), FRG's FGC Managers Group, the 21 local authorities that took part in the 2023 Foundations RCT, and other networks from Coram-i's innovation incubator and D2I's extensive local authority network.

i. Deep-dive visits to LAs

This will involve one-day in-person visits to three to four local authorities to work with a range of staff to discuss the key lines of inquiry. Visits will include individual, paired or small group interviews, as well as demonstrations of data collection methods, analysis and reporting from case management systems and other sources of FGC recording. The visits will be supplemented by reviews of data collection processes, such as internal documents, policies, and procedures, which would take place prior, during and immediately after site visits. The sample for interviews would be dependent on each local authorities' organisational structure and FGC commissioning process. The project team will use their expertise to identify the most appropriate individuals to interview, which will include:

a) **At least two FGC Practitioners** such as local authority FGC coordinators, managers, and commissioned FGC coordinators. Interviews will focus on what data is recorded, how, when, and for what purpose, including their experience of collecting and recording FGC information, the barriers and enablers, as well as the quality and consistency of data. The interviews will also include their perspectives on how families view the collection of FGC data, as well as what data they believe is needed to support improvement of FGC services and which could be provided through a standardised, routine national collection.

b) **At least one Data Lead/Business Analyst** who works with FGC data. Interviews will focus on FGC data systems, flows, validation, quality assurance analysis, and reporting, as well as the case management system used within children's services. They will also cover the barriers and enablers to more robust and comprehensive FGC data collection and integration within case management systems. Interviews would also address the collection of wider existing data and mechanisms for reporting and how they could be used for routine FGC data collection, including the strengths and weaknesses of different methods.

c) **At least one Senior Leader** such as a Heads of Service and Directors or Assistant Directors of Children's Services. Interviews will focus on the strategic context of FGC and data collection as well as perceived barriers and enablers to children's social care data collection within the local authority. Interviews will also gather their perspectives on what is currently reported on, to whom, and for what purposes, as well as what they would like to see collected about FGCs at a local level in addition to more routine FGC data collection.

d) **Engagement with parents/carers**, such as the local authority parent/carer panel. The project team intends to gather views from parents/carers on what data is collected on them

and how in relation to FGCs, as well as what data is not collected and should be, or is collected but shouldn't be and how (and when) it is collected.

Site visits would be followed up by short online co-production sessions where the findings from the visits, including case studies, FGC data and family journey maps, and recommendations on routine national data collection, would be presented back to local authorities for discussion and agreement.

ii. Interviews with additional local authorities

Alongside site visits, the project will conduct online interviews with a larger sample of stakeholders from up to seven additional local authorities to capture different local contexts and different FGC data maturity levels. Short (approx. 30–45 minute) interviews would be conducted with one or two staff (for example, an FGC coordinator/manager and a data lead) to triangulate project findings.

iii. Interviews with experts

The project will also involve interviews with up to eight key expert stakeholders to gain a wider perspective on the key lines of enquiry. This will include understanding enablers and barriers to FGC, or other relevant data collection, and areas of innovative practices or successful implementation of new data collections, including in children's social care. The focus of these interviews will be tailored to the area of expertise of the stakeholder. The sample would be developed in the set-up phase but could include: the Association for the Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), National Performance and Information Management Group, DfE children's social care data leads, the Local Government Association, the Children's Commissioners Office, and selected expert academics. Interviews will be individual or paired and approximately 4560 minutes in length.

iv. Assessment of other relevant data collection processes

An assessment of existing data collections in children's social care will also be conducted to understand the processes, systems, validation, and reporting. The available guidance on data submission and validation will also be reviewed. The project will begin by scoping relevant data sources, which will include gathering views from experts and academics. A draft set of data collections include:

- Children in Need Census collection (DfE)
- SSDA903 Children Looked After data return (DfE)
- Adoption and Special Guardianships (ASG) return (Coram-i)
- Family court statistics (MoJ)
- Early Help Benchmarking voluntary collection
- Section 251 financial data collection (DfE).

An assessment framework will be developed at the start of the project to assess identified data sources. The framework will include, but not be limited to: level of obligation (statutory, voluntary etc.); level(s) of data collection (child, adult, family, household etc.) and linkage of levels; number of fields required and type of data (continuous, ordinal etc.); use of unique identifiers; pseudonymisation; responsibility for data collection and submission; frequency of submission, format and systems; validation; internal and external checks of data; and data reporting.

v. Co-design workshops

The recommendations for the final project report will be discussed and tested in two co-design workshops, which will be held in mid-April and early May with a range of local authorities and stakeholders involved in the deep-dive site visits and interviews, as well as an expanded group of local authorities, including the FRG Family Group Conferencing-Lifelong Links Network. It is critical that a diverse group of local authorities are involved in co-design to ensure that the recommendations account for different levels of FGC service and data maturity. These workshops will be held online and will include a presentation of the findings, including case studies from the in-depth site visits and FGC data system mapping, stakeholder interviews and the assessment of other relevant data collection processes. The workshops will focus on discussing the project findings and co-designing the recommendations for a standardised routine FGC data collection.

Analysis

All interviews will be recorded with consent and transcribed using an external transcription service and/or internal transcription methods. Parent/carer panels will be recorded but not transcribed. Anonymised notes from the panel interviews will be taken instead to protect participant anonymity. Data from the interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes across participants. Themes will be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and findings generated using Braun and Clarke's six-stage process.[17] Interview transcripts and notes will be coded, and themes will be identified using the project's key lines of enquiry. Data will also be coded inductively (driven by the data) to support the identification of any unexpected themes falling outside of the key inquiry lines. An assessment of commonalities and differences in themes from different participant groups (FGC coordinators, data leads, expert stakeholders etc.), and from different local authorities, will be triangulated with findings from the assessment of previous work on FGC data collections.

The co-design workshops, the interim findings presentation and the final report will be informed by the findings from the thematic analysis and from the assessment of other relevant data collection processes. Throughout the analytical process, reflective analytical sessions will take place with those who conducted the fieldwork to reflect, discuss and scrutinise developed themes and provide quality assurance.

Outputs/deliverables

The main output from the project will be the final report, which will include an options analysis and recommendations for standardised routine data collection from local authorities on FGCs in England. The other project outputs include:

- A scoping note which outlines the project aims, methods, project parameters and deliverables for publication on Foundations' website (this document)
- Monthly progress reports

[17] Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflective thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. Vol 4 (11) pp. 589-597.

- Emerging findings which provide early analysis and identification of FGC data collection options (which could be delivered as a presentation)
- A final concise project report, which includes the methods outlined above structured within the key lines of inquiry, as well as:
    - Summary of existing local authority data practices regarding their data recording and collection for FGCs at pre-proceeding stage
    - Stakeholder analysis, including views about existing practices, areas for development/improvements, barriers and enablers
    - A systems map of how FGC data is recorded and where it flows
    - Assessment of other relevant data collection processes
    - Options analysis of the mechanisms available to routinely collect data on family access to FGC at pre-proceeding stage across England
    - Recommendation on the most appropriate mechanism for routinely collecting data on FGC in local authorities in England

To take a truly co-designed approach to developing recommendations, the project team will also produce outputs in line with the needs of local authorities (as identified in fieldwork and co-design phases) to ensure extensive engagement from the wider local authority network. This could include a two to three-page briefing for local authorities, as well as a one-page briefing for parent/carers.

Ethics and participation

Ethics approval for the project will be sought from Coram's Research Ethics Committee (REC), which is chaired by Professor Jonathan Portes. The REC uses the well-established research ethics standards[18] developed at Coram to ensure ethical and methodological rigour and quality. These standards are based on guidelines from the Economic and Social Research Council, the Social Research Association, and the UK Research Integrity Office. An ethics application will be submitted to the REC, which will be reviewed by a minimum of two members. The project will not start until Coram's REC has provided ethical approval.

Researcher and participant safety is vital to deliver ethical and high-quality research. All Coram staff complete level 2 safeguarding courses, have enhanced DBS clearance and complete regular safeguarding training. Coram has strong processes and procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns, which are outlined in safeguarding policy and procedures and overseen by the Coram Group Head of Safeguarding. During data collection, participants may disclose information that raises child protection concerns. Should a research participant reveal that they, or someone else, is at immediate risk of serious harm or death, project staff will consult Max Stanford as the designated safeguarding lead and principal investigator for this project. If a decision is made to report this information via a SCARF, the participant will be carefully informed of this decision and kept informed of the reporting and response process.

The research process will focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and equality (EDIE). This is

[18] https://www.coram.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Coram-Research-Ethics-Policy-June-2023.pdf

particularly important given that children at risk of being taken into care face an intersection of disadvantage and discrimination due to, amongst other reasons, economic deprivation, special educational needs, disability, race, and ethnicity. Research processes must consider and mitigate against these intersections of disadvantage, particularly when research participants are from marginalised communities, are accessing services in the wake of trauma or are experiencing personal vulnerability. The findings from the Foundations' FGC RCT and FRG surveys of FGC services have found that there is a lack of data on the experiences of Black and minority ethnic communities with regards to FGC referrals, delivery, and outcomes. This information is key to understanding how FGC accommodates people from different cultures, conducting anti-racist research, and effectively gaining higher quality data about people's experiences. The following mechanisms will be implemented to ensure the project is held accountable to its EDIE commitments:

- the ethics process considers EDIE in research approaches
- the CoramBAAF's anti-racism statement and Coram's diversity and inclusion policy will promote inclusivity and diversity
- accessibility will be central to the research approach, which includes providing participants with accessible information to support their informed consent and ensuring they feel comfortable during fieldwork and interviews
- explore how local data systems record access for diverse groups to FGCs
- include the voices and perspectives of families from diverse groups on the data that is collected about them
- project meetings with Foundations will have EDIE as a regular agenda item
- project team to engage in regular reflective practice sessions to discuss and openly challenge position and perspectives as a predominantly white British team of researchers and how this may influence the interpretations of findings.

Data protection

The project team will work closely with Foundations to ensure data related to the project is collected, shared, analysed, and stored appropriately. Coram holds a Cyber Essentials Plus certificate and all staff receive data security and GDPR training. Coram have extensive experience supporting Foundations with data protection processes to identify and mitigate against risks. The project team anticipate that the lawful basis for processing personal data will be public task (Article 6(1)(e) of the GDPR) and do not envisage handling any special category data as part of this project. All personal data, documents and interview data collected as part of this project will be stored on Coram's secure servers and data will be transferred via secure Egress.

Interviews will only be recorded with informed consent and recordings will be deleted after project completion and other data anonymised.
The project team will not use identifying information when reporting and disseminating findings.

Personnel

The project will be led by Coram and delivered in partnership with FRG, Daybreak and D2I. The collective experience and expertise of the consortium includes FGC research, as well as FGC delivery, training and accreditation for local authorities. The partnership has significant expertise in gathering comprehensive data from local authorities on FGCs, as well as the development, collection, validation, and reporting of nationally representative, routinely collected data from local authorities. The partnership has longstanding, established relationships with local authorities and expert stakeholders and extensive experience in co-designing data standards and processes. Coram will lead the day-to-day project management of the project.

- **Max Stanford**: Head of Impact and Evaluation at Coram – will oversee the day-to-day delivery of the project.
- **Kevin Yong**: Director of Coram-I – will provide expert input, support research activities and work on the development of project recommendations.
- **Cathy Ashley**: Chief Executive at FRG – will provide expert input and support research activities and work on the development of project recommendations.
- **Sean Haresnape**: Practice Lead for FGCs and Lifelong Links at FRG – will input into lead on engagement with the FGC/LLL network and additional experts convened by FRG.
- **Beverley Campbell**: Family Participation Officer – will lead engagement with parents/carers to support inclusion of family voice in the project.
- **Karen Brown**: Chief Operating Officer at Daybreak – will provide expert input, support research activities and work on the development of project recommendations
- **Alistair Herbert**: lead officer for Data to Insight – will provide support for the ongoing engagement with local authorities and expert input into the assessment of data collections and during the co-design phase of the project.

Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ Leading
4 January – 9 February	Set-up phase: kick off meeting, data protection, ethics approval, project scoping note	Coram
12 February – 12 April	Discovery phase: parent/carer panel interviews; deep-dive visits with local authorities; interviews with stakeholders; review of data collection processes	Project team
8 April	Emerging findings presented and discussed with Foundations	Project team
April – May	Co-design workshops to feed into final report	Project team
8 May	First draft of final report due	Project team
31 May	Final report due, including options and recommendations for routine approach to FGC data collection across England.	Project team