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FAMILY CONFERENCE (FC) IN THE JUVENILE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN UKRAINE.
DOES IT WORK AND WHY?

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Background. Foundation Friends of Priluky supports professionals working in the juvenile colonies of Melitopol, Priluky and Kremenchug by conducting workshops and trainings in pedagogical approaches, system approach, risk assessment and creating a positive living climate. The program is conducted in the framework of the project 'Supporting Drug Treatment Systems in Prisons' of Council of Europe's Pompidou Group.

Family Conferencing (FC) is a practical tool. It is a form of restorative justice and part of a system approach. FC harmonizes with the Ukrainian culture and turned out to be a good alternative for – though not in conflict with - probation services and aftercare services for juveniles who will be released from the colony. The model was enthusiastically retrieved and applied by the colonies.

The main principle of the FC is that one member of a family system, in this case a juvenile, is looking for answers to a very serious problem or issue (alcohol/substance misuse, crime and the risk of recidivism) with the help of the system he or she is part of. The system can be the (extended) family and include significant others (from the juvenile's point of view). It can be held during the first part of the sentence or at the end when the session is focused on reintegration. When applied in the criminal justice system, the FC also focuses on restoration of the social network, addressing social problems such as alcohol and substance misuse, promotion of a smooth release from the colony and rehabilitation, and thus on prevention of recidivism and alcohol and substance misuse.

On request of the Probation Department of ministry of Justice in Ukraine, Pompidou Group gave assignment for an (evaluation) research on implementation which was finalized March 2018.

Objective. To conduct a primary evaluation of FC in juvenile colonies in Ukraine.

Materials and methods. Literature research; Qualitative research (24 interviews: 7 juveniles, 4 parents, 13 staff members and Focus group with staff).

Results. The interviews and focus group pointed at the following conclusions.

There were several differences in the experiences that were shared in the interviews and focus groups, but the common feature was a very positive attitude towards FC by the involved juveniles, parents and staff. They all mentioned positive changes in attitudes of participants to the FC at the personal level, but also changes in the atmosphere and colonies were shared.

The expectations often had to do with wanting to have a better communication with parents or with children and to be able to talk about what happened and about future plans. To make use of the offer to take part in FC gave the opportunity to do so in a way that was created in a safe setting and accompanied/guided.

The main outcomes were positive. All interviewees were happy about what they discussed, would do it again or recommend it to others.

Topics for discussion or improvement have to do with the plans that were made which could have a clearer focus, with aftercare that could improve, but also with a clear focus of the meaning of the FC. The interviews showed that at the moment there are two models in practice: One using FC to establish contact with the (family) system and restore the relations between the members of the system. Therefore, the model is focused on being able to contribute to a better quality of life during stay and to offer direction in the way this particular juvenile should be guided and treated. The second FC is focused on the release and reintegration of the juvenile in his/her family or another local context. The plan made is then oriented towards reintegration.

Conclusions. It can be concluded that a Family Conference as conducted in the juvenile colonies in Ukraine, is a useful tool in a closed facility to increase contact between the detainee and his/her family, it is based on system approaches and restorative justice practices and that it is uniquely adapted to the local context.

Family conference allows to establish contact with juveniles, to improve their relationship with the family, to discuss complex issues and to motivate them to changes (including receiving mental health help if necessary).

It is suggested to build further on the two different forms of FC in the colonies and ideally install both, thus one in the beginning of the stay at the colony with a focus on a good communication and understanding with parents during the stay and the other at the end phase focused on reintegration. Additional trainings for involved staff is also a condition for continuity and keeping the quality. Monitoring, inter vision and evaluation is also recommended. Also it is needed to connect FC to a social context, broader than the juvenile institution itself, in which the preparation of parents and the family system can take place. But also as a condition to organize a follow up of the family plan, even after release. This is needed in order to really being able to contribute to rehabilitation of the juvenile into society without a high risk of recidivism and also to be able to guide safety-issues if they occur.

Keywords: family conference, restorative justice, juvenile justice.