

## **Family based group homes – Empowered Foster Care**

*A model to combine foster care with professional staff to enable foster care to accommodate children and adolescents in need for treatment in a family based setting instead of placing them in an institution*

*August 2015*

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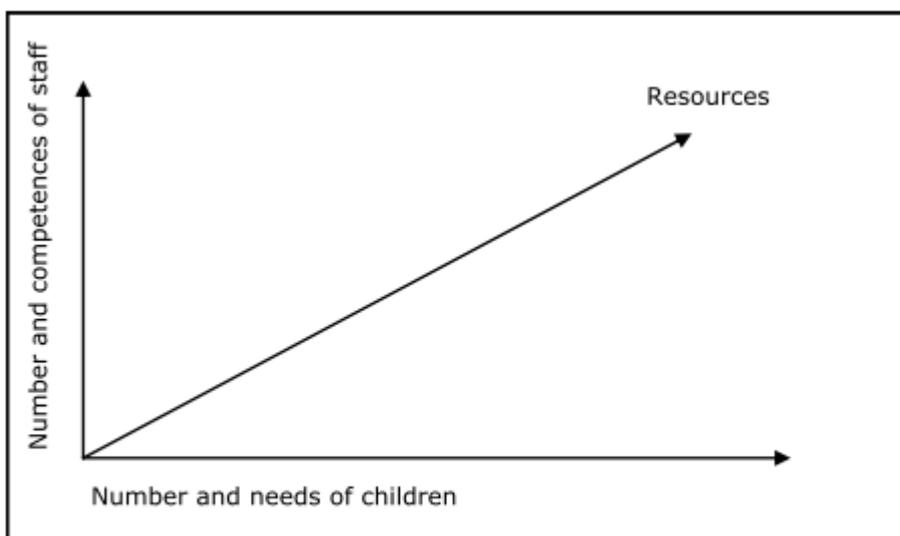
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### Summary

## Introduction

This paper is a short introduction to the model of Family Based Group Homes. It can be used as an inspiration for those, who are considering developing group homes for one or more specified target groups, and who want to work according to the principles of this model.

Family Based Group Homes is a model for placement of children in alternative care based on a third way between foster care and residential or institutionalized care. It is basically a model that takes some of the best elements of both foster care and institutions and combines them in an setting that on the one hand gives the children a childhood environment as close to a normal family as possible and on the other hand, secures a professional approach for children with special needs.



Allocation of resources needed

Family-Based Group Homes may vary with settings that have few or more children, few or more employees and children with minor or major medical needs. In practice it may vary from a traditional foster care with extended support and advice for specialized treatment with highly qualified staff for children with very special needs. Common to them all is the fixed continuous family that provides the framework and continuity around the kids.

The foster family living in the group home ensures stability in the child's life and gives the child a far greater opportunity to build up lasting relations than changing staff can. At the same time the external staff can bring professional skills into the group home, that foster family do not possess and increase the dynamics in the work with children with special needs.

Family Based Group Homes is an opportunity to offer family-like environment for children and young people who can not be immediately placed in foster care and therefore would otherwise be placed in residential care. It may be due to social, mental or physical problems that are of a nature that they sets requirements for their care, that not normally can be provided by a traditional foster care.

In a Family Based Group Home the foster family can be enhanced with the necessary resources to ensure that the group home can not only contain or support the child, but can help it to develop its full potential so it can get a future life as self-reliant as possible.

Family Based Group Homes can be created so that they are targeting the needs of one or more target groups. By doing so, you can get greater benefits of the placement and at the same time prevent the collapse of the placement.

The model can be used both for long-term placements, such as growing environment throughout childhood for orphans, abandoned children and others where there is no contact with the parents, or it can be used as a temporary treatment home, where the child comes from his own family or network and will go back here after the treatment. The child's family and network are thus of great importance to how the Family Based Group Home and its efforts is organized.

## **Staff**

### ***The foster family***

- *Approval*
- *Background*
- *Education*
- *Biological children*
- *Relations between biological and foster children*

Establishing and approval of the Family Based Group Home requires an assessment of the background of the foster family in terms of health, mental robustness, stability, view of human nature, ethics, education and work experience. This is important when assessing the target groups and the gravity of needs they can work with. It is not, however, required that the foster family's education and background covers all professional aspects of working with the target group, as this knowledge can be applied to the Family Based Group Home through the associated staff or external consultants, all pursuant to the target group.

In addition, for some specific target groups, it must be considered whether it is possible for the foster family to have children of their own and if so, what age they may have.

### ***Other staff***

- *Approval*
- *Background*
- *Education*

The staffing structure must be shown in the Family-Based Group Homes approval. The approval must consider the requirements of employees educational, training and work history. There can be separate requirements for documentation of criminal record, and a special criminal record containing child abuse disclosure to ensure that persons who have been convicted of assault and the like can not work with children and young people.

### ***Counselling***

- *Content*
- *Quantity*

It is important that both the foster family and employees receive the necessary counselling from an affiliated psychologist, psychiatrist or educational consultant in accordance with the required knowledge of the target group from the supervisor. There can be both case counselling on the treatment of the individual child and group counselling on cooperation in the staff and what the work with the children does to the employees.

### ***Special variation***

- *If the group home works without a foster family*

Another way to recruit staff if it is not possible to find a suitable foster family is to let some of the employees work in "family teams" where employees work two shifts, alternating working four days, three days off, then works three days and four days off. Supplementary employees

might work in shifts and possibly cover the family teams during holiday or disease. In this way some of the same stability and continuity of a foster family is secured.

## **Physical environment**

### **House**

- *Size*
- *Rooms*
- *Furnishing*

The Family Based Group Home should be designed so that it looks like an ordinary large family, with the least possible resemblance to an institution. There must be a number of rooms for the children according to national standards. The furnishing should be individual to counteract institutionalisation. There must be room for common activities both indoors and outdoors. Family Based Group Homes for children with physical disabilities should be arranged in the best way to support the child's opportunities for self-expression and acting on its own.

### **Neighborhood**

- *Schools*
- *Leisure time possibilities*
- *Meeting other children*

The Family Based Group Home must have access to local schools or any special schools for children with special needs. There must be opportunities for the child to participate in local sports and leisure activities and through this meeting other children

## **The children and young people**

### **Involvement**

- *In general*
- *In entering care*
- *In daily life*
- *In leaving care*

Children must due to age and ability be involved in all matters affecting their lives, development and welfare. Both the placing authority and the Family Based Group Home has a responsibility to involve the child in all matters relating to the placement, ranging from the choice of placement, entering care, daily life during placement, education, training, conditions concerning relocation and aftercare

### **Group size**

- *Significance of group dynamics*

The number of children in a Family Based Group Home must be determined on basis of the needs of treatment or care of the children, and the total resources in terms of staff and skills, etc. of the Family Based Group Home. In order to prevent institutionalization a Family Based Group Home in principle should not receive more than 8-10 children. A Family Based Group Home has generally more resources than a traditional foster home, and can take care of children who need a more professional effort than traditional foster family can provide. This means, among other things, that a Family Based Group Home may receive children who needs more specialized care or treatment than a traditional foster family can. At the same time, a Family Based Group Home can provide a more stable upbringing environment for groups of children than institutions.

### **Age groups**

- *Questions to consider*

In determining the group size the age of the children should be taken into consideration. In principle, small children should be placed in smaller Family Based Group Homes than older children. For Family Based Group Home, which serves as a home for the entire childhood there are advantages in an age spread among the children while for groups of young people with special needs it can be an advantage with a more uniform age group.

### **Target groups**

- *The different target groups*
- *Can different target groups be mixed*

The question of target group is extremely important when you have to create the framework for a good Family Based Group Home. There is a difference in the children's needs and thus in the effort the Family Based Group Home must be able to deliver. There is a big difference between receiving children who do not have a special need and children who need treatment, help and care in a family-like upbringing environment. One must also be aware of how different target groups interact when determining which groups the Family Based Group Home can receive. For example, it is advised not to place young offenders together with victims of abuse. The bigger problem the children holds the greater the attention must be to prevent undesirable behavior among the group of children.

### **Activities**

- *Inside the group home*
- *Outside the group home*

Depending on age the Family Based Group Home should offer appropriate activities for the children. Both leisure activities like games and sports, but also in the context of everyday life in the group home. Children must as far as possible take part in everyday activities in the same way as in an ordinary family, tidying, cleaning, cooking, shopping, possibly animal husbandry etc.

The Family Based Group Home must also support the children to participate in recreational activities, sports and a possible part time job outside the group home according to their age, and work to integrate them into the local environment.

### **Treatment**

- *Paedagogical*
- *Therapeutic*
- *Psychological*
- *Psychiatric*
- *Cognitive*

Family Based Group Homes must work with educational and therapeutic methods that correspond to the specific target group. It must be associated with relevant professionals, psychiatrists, psychologists etc. according to the children's specific problems

### **Education**

- *Cooperation with the local school*
- *Homework*

Schooling is essential for children's opportunities to live an independent life as adults with work, family, home and friends. The Family Based Group Home must therefore work hard to ensure their children the best possible education. It is therefore necessary to establish a good working relationship with the local school system, where the Family Based Group Home can support the local school in case of any problems or conflicts at school. The Family Based Group Home must support the children doing their homework.

### **Prevention of abuse**

- *Focus on staff*
- *Focus on children*
- *How to react in case of abuse*

The Family Based Group Home must focus on the prevention of abuse to the children of any kind. Be it abuse by staff members, the children's family or from other children. There must be clarity among the staff on the view of sexuality and abuse to ensure a culture of openness and transparency.

Experience shows that most abuse occurs among the children themselves, why one in the selection of a group home should pay special attention to the history and experiences of the children and their interaction with the children who already are living in the group home.

## **Family and network**

### ***Involvement and cooperation***

- *In all decisions when possible*
- *Daily cooperation*
- *Methods*

Relationship with parents and siblings is extremely important for all children in care. This applies not only to the children for whom the plan is that they are going to move back to their parents after treatment. This also applies to children whose parents can not be expected at any time to meet their parental responsibilities. It is therefore important that The Family Based Group Home in the broadest possible way involves the parents in decisions concerning the child and ensures contact between the child and the parents and also with siblings. If more children in a family should be placed, it is important, if possible, to place the children in the same group home so they can maintain their family ties.

## **Placement – from start to finish**

### **Matching process**

- Child needs versus group home competences
- Mutual knowledge of Local Authorities and group home
- Mutual knowledge of biological parents (if present) and group home
- Mutual knowledge of child and group home

It is very important to ensure the best match between the needs of the child and the competence of the group home. It requires a thorough investigation of the child, identification of its needs and potentials and a thorough documentation and description of the skills and experience of the group home. There is therefore a need for the authority which approves the group home, to create the most comprehensive and transparent picture of the group homes strengths - and weaknesses - when describing the skills that form the basis for approval.

This gives the placing authority the best possible basis for choosing the appropriate placement facility for the specific child. It also gives both the child and the parents / families the possibility to consider the placement.

### **Entering care**

- Pre-visit
- Moving in

After the placing authority has assessed the matching between the child and the group home the placement must be prepared. If possible, the child and the child's family should see the proposed group home before entering care. If there are enough resources the parents can visit the group home first, so that parents have the opportunity to give their acceptance of the group home before the child visits the group home. For older children, it is important that they are involved in the choice of care and have the opportunity to visit the group home and possibly talk to some of the young people who already are living there. It is important that the placing authority has resolved both the appropriation and other formal conditions and that the custodial parent is also clarified. This ensures the best possible support for the placement.

### **Paedagogical effort and treatment**

- Based on child needs

The group home must work from a pedagogical method that corresponds to the needs of the children. Working with the children should not only focus on helping them with respect to the physical, social or distress they may suffer from, but also to support their potential. The group home must ensure that the methods used are obvious from the description of the group home,

and that they are known to all employees. A treatment plan for each child should be developed at the placement, or shortly hereafter, and evaluated and adjusted at least twice a year.

### **Leaving care**

- Valuing child competences and needs

Already at the time of placement of the child one should begin to speculate on what will happen after the placement. At least when the child approaches the age of 18, one should make a plan for the child's further education, employment and housing. This should take a position on the scope of aftercare. The group home must have contacts with potential living facilities for the young, either in-house or in the community in connection with the young persons place of education or work.

### **Aftercare**

- When returning to biological parents
- When leaving for independent living

For children who return to their biological parents after the treatment, the group home or the placing authority must be able to support the child and family in a transitional period after the end of the placement.

The group home must be able to support young people who move to a independent living or a half way houses, just as many young persons will need to draw on the support and encouragement from the group home in the transition to independent living.

## **Organisational questions**

### **Organisation**

- Social Enterprises
- Foundation
- Private company

Social enterprises are an appropriate form of organization for Family Based Group Homes. Either as a private enterprise, small funds or operated by not for profit organizations. Family-Based Group Homes can also be driven by major foundations, or local authorities who employ foster family and staff.

### **Economy**

- Budget
- Accounting

The Family Based Group Home operates on the basis of a budget covering the operational costs of the group home. The main items include salaries, rent and other expenses, that can be divided according to the activities and treatment services of the group home. There must be a transparent economy where it is clear for what the money is spent.

Family-Based Group Homes must submit audited financial statements in accordance with applicable national standards.

### **Approval and supervision**

- Legislation
- Regulations
- Body of approval and supervision

Family Based Group Homes can be regulated by national legislation with an associated set of rules that contain licensing requirements, supervision system and quality standards.

Approval and supervision can be advantageously carried out by a national body. Approving and supervision should be defined in a regulatory framework that clearly outlines the scope and content of supervision. This operational inspection does not replace the personal supervision of the individual child, which may be performed by the placement authority.

In Denmark, approval and supervision of a quality model in which social services as Family-Based Group Homes are assessed based on seven themes:

- 1 Education and Employment
- 2 Independence and relationships
- 3 Target group, methods and results
- 4 Organization and Management
- 5 Competences
- 6 Economy
- 7 Physical environment

For the seven themes there is a total of 14 criteria with a total of 39 indicators.

### **Quality assurance and development**

It is important to ensure continued development and improvement in all types of social services. This can, in addition to through the supervision, be done by working with quality development and quality assurance. For example in a certification scheme like Accreditation Denmark or EQUASS Assurance

## **Summary**

- Family Based Group Homes is a model for placement of children in alternative care based on a third way between foster care and residential care. It is basically a model which takes some of the best elements of both foster care and residential care and combines them in an setting that on the one hand gives the children a childhood environment as close to a normal family as possible, and on the other hand, secures a professional approach for children with special needs.
- Family Based Group Homes can be organized to receive both orphans and other children for the rest of their childhood and for contemporary placements in care for treatment due to special needs of the child.
- The foster family and their staff should receive counseling from qualified advisers in their work.
- Family Based Group Homes should be as close to an ordinary home as possible and be well integrated in the local community.
- Family Based Group Homes can be approved for specific target groups by a national body, who supervise their work and they should work according to national quality standards in a open and transparent way.
- Family Based Group Homes should involve the children in all matters affecting their lives.
- Family Based Group Homes should when possible involve biological parents in important decisions concerning their child.

