



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Family Group Conferencing and Kinship Care: Australasian perspectives

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Family group conferencing

- Introduced in Aotearoa New Zealand law and practice in 1989
- Introduced as a culturally responsive way of diverting children and their families from the court system
- In the years 2010/2011, over 15,000 FGCs were held in New Zealand across care and protection and youth justice
- It has become the key decision-making mechanism



The FGC in Australia

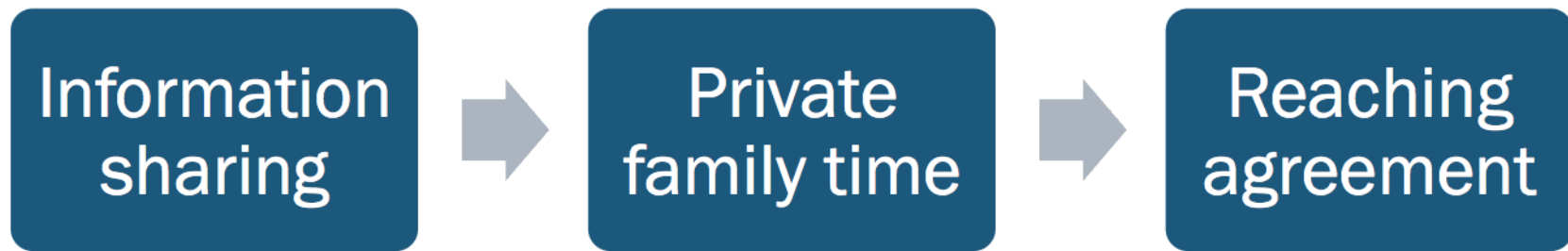
- The FGC was introduced first in Victoria, followed quickly by other states (Harris 2008:6):

Victoria	Family decision making, Aboriginal Family Decision Making	1992-
South Australia	Family care meetings	1994-
New South Wales	Family decision making conferences	1996-2000
Western Australia	Family group conferences	1996-2001
Australian Capital Territory	Family group conferences	1999-
Tasmania	Family group conferences	2000-
Queensland	Family group meetings	2006-
Northern Territory	Never used	Never used

- It is, nevertheless, used at the discretion of the worker



Countries have generally adopted the NZ model...



Issues in developing a knowledge base

- Research has largely been undertaken outside Australasia. The US has led the advancement of FGC research, firstly through American Humane, now the Kempe Center
 - Annotated bibliography on family engagement strategies can be found on: www.fgdm.org
- Much research has been focused on programmatic needs, few meeting the 'gold-standard' criteria of evidence-based practice expectations
- There are, nevertheless, illuminating insights that can be drawn from the mix of research projects available



Messages from research

- High levels of service user satisfaction
- Issues raised about private family time
- Ascertaining the voices of children is complex
- Reduction in child maltreatment and re-substantiation of abuse; increased placement stability; and increased support
- Some research nevertheless raises challenging issues in this regard

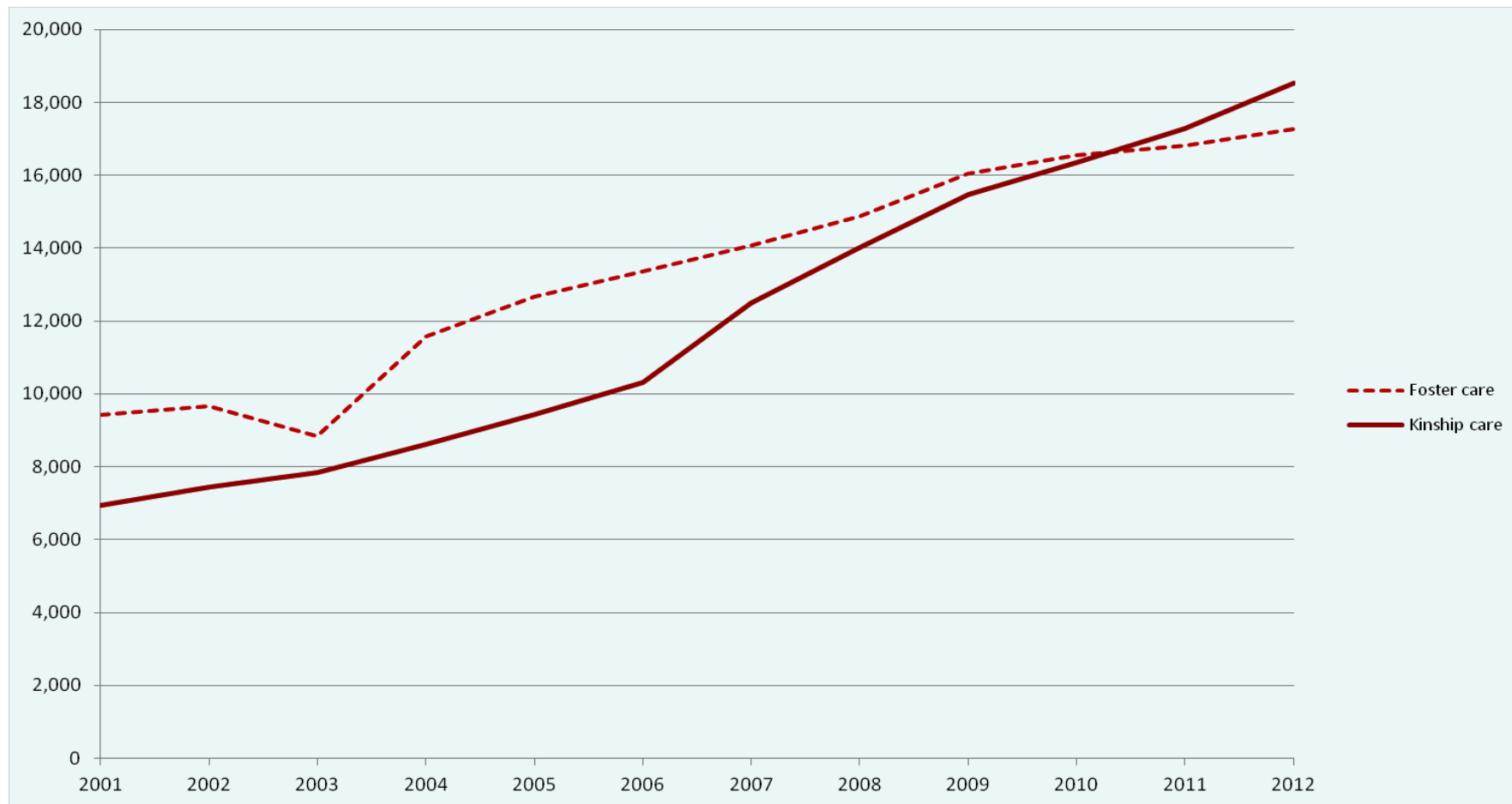


Kinship care

- Children have always been looked after and supported by people other than their parents – extended family has been the foundational safety net for children
- Internationally we have seen shifts toward encouraging extended family systems to support and care for vulnerable infants. In Aotearoa, this was critically influenced by the FGC process
- In 2010, for the first time in Australia, statutory kinship care overtook foster care in the statutory care statistics



Children in Australian foster and kinship care 2001-2012 (Kiraly 2013)

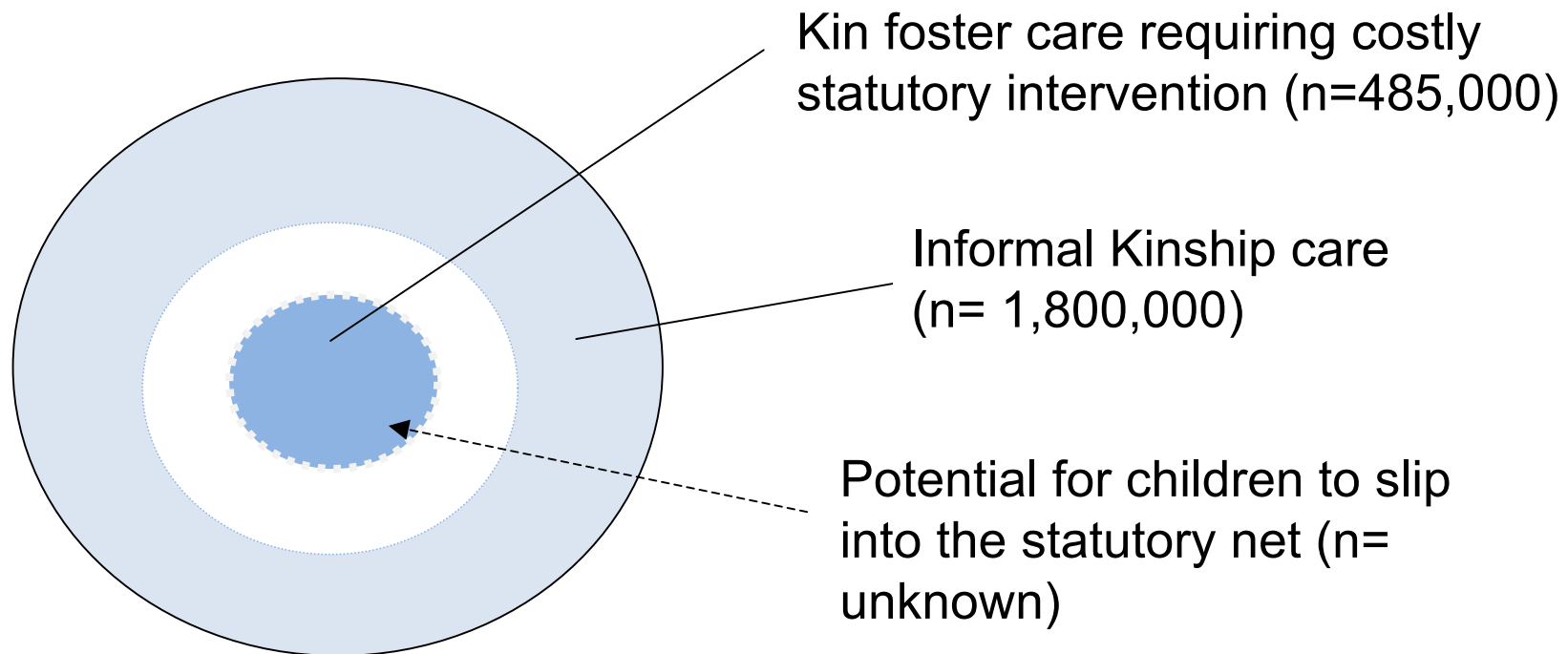


Informal kinship care

- Although kinship care is prioritized as the preferred care option for vulnerable children, the majority of kinship carers are not supported by the government.
- At least in part this is because of the complex tensions that exist in terms of family rights and responsibilities, and the role of the state in supporting familial care.
- ‘Residual’ approaches to child protection have tended to take a ‘hands-off’ approach, resulting in few resources being made available for the sizable population of non-statutory kinship carers and the children they raise.



So whose responsibility is informal kinship care?



(Ehrle, J., Geen, R. & Clark, R.L., 2001; Geen, 2004)

If children slip into the statutory net it would place an untenable strain on (already struggling) statutory services. Broader government support could therefore be beneficial to both the state and the families involved.

What is needed in Australasia?

