

Families in trouble – who can help?

One effective method of support is the family council, a way of involving a child's or young person's familiar social environment.

Family council is about activating relatives, friends, neighbours, teachers, employers – anyone connected to a young person with an interest in his/her positive development.

Such an organised network may contribute untapped skills, contacts, time, material resources and an intimate understanding of a given situation.

Self-determination – the fundamental principle of the family council

AIS Youth Service assigns a specially trained family council co-ordinator to help the family establish a family council.

Once established, the family council **plans, decides and acts on its own accord and initiative.**

Each member of the family council – especially the young client – has a voice in decision-making.

If external professional assistance (legal counsel, therapy etc.) is desired, the co-ordinator provides relevant information and contacts.

Procedure

A representative of the Office for Youth and Families states a concern and contracts a family council co-ordinator to establish a family council.

1. Preparation stage (3-4 weeks)
 - Choosing individuals who will give support
 - Appointing a time and place for them to meet
 - The co-ordinator contacts each family council member
2. Family council
 - Concern is communicated, information shared
 - Family-only planning phase (all professional helpers leave)
 - Their plan is presented (all procedures must be legal and safe); implementation is decided.
3. Implementation of the plan
4. Follow-up council, evaluation

Case Examples

- Two siblings, both of them minors, have lost their parents in an accident. Both want to stay in the parental home. A **family council consisting of relatives and neighbours organises** practicable conditions enabling them to remain in their home.
- A single mother is overwhelmed by the combined demands of job and child-care. In order to avoid the children's removal to a social services institution, a **family council of relatives, friends and neighbours** is organised.
- A young person is scheduled to return home from placement in a social institution. A **family council of relatives decides** to take advantage of a support system provided by the **school or employer**.
- After encountering school problems, a twelve-year old refuses to go to school. Both parents are working, the father works out of town. A **family**

council consisting of the child's friends and relatives works on a solution involving the support of a dedicated teacher.

Family Council as a Social Service Method

As a social service method, the family council has been tried and tested for decades across the world, including 19 countries in Europe. In Styria, this method is pioneered by AIS Youth Service.

Family Council is Empowerment and Participation

The family council provides a framework for enabling families to engage relatives, friends, neighbours and other associates in finding problem solutions.

Core Elements of the Family Council

Trust, openness for any solution, independent co-ordination.

Family Council Coordinator

Arnold Gröbacher

Social worker, mediator, supervisor