Eigen Kracht-conferences: results and profits

Research shows that Eigen Kracht-conferences are effective, even in complex situations where youth care is involved, in cases of domestic violence, as well where so-called multi-problem families are concerned. The costs are relatively low, clients are satisfied, and in most cases the quality of the plan that families make is good, according to family as well as professionals. Most plans are executed, the problems are solved and escalation is prevented. In many cases, Eigen Kracht is effective as well as cost saving. This is because families use their own resources; instead of applying for residential care, as professionals might do, they arrange for help at home and for (network) foster care instead of residential youth care. Even if Dutch research into financial profits of Eigen Kracht has been done on a small scale only, the results are in line with international research into Family Group Conferencing (FGC).

The Dutch studies were done by various research bureaus and vary in framework and scale. The studies are about the Eigen Kracht Conference model only. Characteristic for this model is the independent Eigen Kracht coordinator, who has no attachment to a decision making or care giving institution. The Eigen Kracht centrale considers it important to emphasize that the costs and profits described below only happen in this particular setting. The Centrale thinks that taking the lead and participating in a decision making process is only possible when there is a balance of power. This is not the case when professionals in youth care facilitate the decision making process of families, as these professionals, by definition, then have two parts to play. Network approaches that are done by social care workers are therefore not included in this research.

As stated above, the Dutch studies were conducted by various research bureaus; the following may be concluded about the effectiveness of Eigen Kracht-conferences:

Promoting social cohesion
Eigen Kracht-conferences promote social cohesion. The circle of active participators around a family is enlarged. This is the first thing to happen when an Eigen Kracht-conference is initiated. An average of 13 persons takes part in an Eigen Kracht-conference. These people contribute their knowledge and cooperate in formulating and executing a plan. Children and young persons like the fact that their family and environment are working on a solution. The increase in social cohesion is consolidated after the conference and is still notable after 9 months. Parents indicate that they experience more support with parenting and need less support than at the time of the conference. Social cohesion improves the wellbeing of the social environment. Neglect by the social environment, neglecting the social environment and neglecting a child: these processes that interact and enhance each other may be stopped by an Eigen Kracht-conference.

Improvement of the child’s situation
The execution of the plans that were made during an Eigen Kracht-conference, lead to an improvement of the situation of the child. The number of care items decreases. This happens noticeably faster than in situations where no Eigen Kracht-conference took place. Professionals as well as family members notice an improvement in safety and wellbeing of the child. Research into the use of Eigen Kracht-conferences in youth care proves that Eigen Kracht results are at least as good as regular practice, as far as promoting the safety of children is concerned. In cases of out-of-home placement, it is noteworthy that children are placed out-of-home for a shorter period of time and often find a place to stay with family and network.
Activating family and environment
Not only do family members and people from the environment come to the conference, they also actively offer their help and support. An average of 80% of the agreements that are laid down in the plans are for account of family and people from the environment. This makes them an important resource. Follow up research shows that the majority of the support and help that was offered is actually provided. The majority of the plans is executed either fully or partly.

Reduce in care consumption
In New Zealand, where FGC is a legal right, the use of FGC has lead to great changes: the number of children in government care was reduced by 60% and the number of court orders was reduced substantially. There are several indications that care consumption decreases in The Netherlands as well, when Eigen Kracht conferences are employed. Research into youth care shows that the number of care items decreases faster in families where a conference was held, than in families without a conference. This means that care is needed for a shorter period of time, which reduces the total amount of professional care. In youth care, the number of out-of-home placements is equal in families that did or did not have a Family Group-conference, but on average the placements are three months shorter and take place in network foster families more often. This is in line with the data that were gathered of all Family Group Conferences. These show that 48% of the children had a less drastic change in residence when they were placed out-of-home. It also shows that families in youth care where a conference was planned but not held, received non-residential care more often. Also, the form of care they received was more severe.

Based on the preceding, it is to be expected that the use of Eigen Kracht-conferences is cost reducing. This is implicated by two studies. Research in Overijssel compared the plans of professionals with those of families, where 83% of professional help was substituted by help from family and network. A second research, in which the costs of social care in cases with an Eigen Kracht-conference were compared with the costs of comparable cases without Eigen Kracht-conference, showed substantial differences between the two. In cases where an Eigen Kracht-conference was held, (less expensive) network foster care was preferred over (more expensive) residential care.
Table 1- Costs of social care with and without EKC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indication of costs per kind of help</th>
<th>Kind of file</th>
<th>Total costs (€)</th>
<th>Number of files</th>
<th>Average costs (€) per file</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>7,760</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shadow group</td>
<td>89,920</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster care</td>
<td>EKC</td>
<td>44,530</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6,360</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shadow group</td>
<td>19,040</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,810</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-residential care</td>
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<td>27,800</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6,950</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shadow group</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total amount of costs</td>
<td>EKC</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>8,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shadow group</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>16,180</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Directorship more with families**

Eigen Kracht-conferences contribute to a more demand-based care system. The emphasis is on empowerment, and activating the people who ask for care. There is a shift in focus of the problem: to what extent can this family carry its burden. Families and their environment make a plan themselves, usually after they have been informed by social care workers. They take directorship in making the plan, and usually they don’t relinquish that directorship afterwards. Professionals as well as families judge that the directorship has come to rest more with the family, after the Eigen Kracht-conference. This means, amongst others, that families ask for help sooner when they think they need it, and that the amount of professional help in the family has decreased. A side effect of this shift in directorship is that professionals (re)consider their part in the cooperation with families. Because of the conference, they get to know more people from the network.

**Effective in complicated situations**

The Eigen Kracht-conference can be used, and is effective, in complicated situations. The effects and profits described above happen in families with multiple problems, within youth care as well as outside youth care. The opinion that Eigen Kracht-conferencing cannot be used in youth care is not supported by research. The same goes for the use of Eigen Kracht-conferencing in families with complex problems or in situations where domestic violence is an issue.

**Eigen Kracht Centrale, 2010**

The research reports to which reference is made in the above text are available in Dutch:

i Research bureau Decide concludes that Eigen Kracht-conferences are effective, for the immediate goal for which they are employed as well as for taking responsibility in taking care of oneself and mutual involvement of citizens. It is recommended that research is done into the cost of care of families where a conference did or did not take place. (Knoop, J. van der (2009) Eigen Kracht. Burgerschap, beleid en barrières. Een verkennend onderzoek naar de kansen van Eigen Kracht protocollen in de huidige maatschappelijke context. Groningen: Decide)


vi Wijnen-Lunenburg e.a. (2008)


xi Wijnen-Lunenburg e.a. (2008)


xiii Wijnen-Lunenburg e.a. (2008)


xvi Uit: Van Naem & Partners (2009)

xvii Wijnen-Lunenburg e.a. (2008)

xviii Beek, F. van (2006)
