



London Family Court Open Day

The Family Courts Unlocked

1000 people came through the doors, seven Mayors, three MPS and one rock star!

Members of the public queued outside Croydon and Brent Family Courts for the official opening of the first ever Family Court Open Day. Francis Rossi of Status Quo cut the ribbon at Croydon, the Mayor of Hounslow opened Richmond, Susan Tether MP, Brent, and the Mayor of Havering attended Stratford. The day started with a welcome video by the President of the Family Division, Sir Mark Potter, played simultaneously in all four courts.

There was a real buzz about the courthouse at Croydon, especially in the morning with the press, and BBC London Regional News television cameras filming one of the courtroom scenes.



Francis Rossi of Status Quo joined Croydon, Sutton and Merton Mayors and local MPs for the opening ceremony.

The Chairman's tour of the capitals' courts



Wheels of fire: Pam Ullstein, Chairman GLFP, gets whisked across London

The first ever Family Court Open Day was well attended, with over 1000 members of the general public, as well as exhibitors, coming through the doors of the four participating courts. Well over 200 volunteers were involved. It was truly a team project with each and every person's contribution vital to the success of the day.

Events were synchronised at all four centres - the President of the Family Division's welcome and the same mock hearings were followed by questions from the public. This allowed the public to experience the Family Proceedings Court (FPCs), dispelling the myth of it being a 'secret' court. The public finally had the opportunity to see for themselves what really happens in the FPCs and to learn how many experts and agencies are often involved in assisting the courts coming to decisions. It demonstrated the service that the FPCs provide to their local communities.

It enabled exhibitors from over 25 agencies and support services to increase awareness of what their organisation offers to the public. It allowed them to network and gave them the chance to see mock hearings in action. It was an education opportunity for foster carers, law students and student social workers who saw the informal atmosphere and the decision making process.

Congratulations everybody!

*Pam Ullstein,
Chairman GLFP*

"The court open days are an excellent means of demonstrating this openness and absence of secrecy whilst continuing to protect the privacy of the children and their families. I hope that they will continue as a means of increasing the confidence of those who come to the courts for help."

Prof. Harry Zeitlin (Emeritus Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, London University)

The four courts that opened their doors were:

Croydon

Brent

Richmond

Stratford

Well over 200 volunteers were involved as magistrates, court staff, legal and other

Exhibitors & Sponsors

With thanks to

Exhibitors:

Association of Lawyers for children
 Atkins Hope Solicitors
 Barnado's
 Brent Centre for Young People
 Brent Homestart
 Cafcass
 Care Leavers Association
 Child Abuse Investigation Team
 Childline
 Community Legal Advice Service
 Croham Services for Children
 Dads' Space
 Family Bar Association
 Families need Fathers
 GLFP
 GOSH
 Grandparents association
 Institute of Psychotherapists
 London Criminal Justice Board
 Nagalro
 NSPCC
 Magistrates Association
 McMillan Williams Solicitors
 Ministry of Justice
 Parentline Plus
 Relate
 Royal College of Paediatricians
 Royal College of Psychiatrists
 Safeguarding Children's Board
 Samaritans
 St Christophers Centre
 St Christopher's Fostering
 Welcare Croydon
 Witness Support Service

Sponsors:

British Telecom
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 Her Majesty's Court Service
 London Criminal Justice Board
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"It was surprisingly well attended and gave me the opportunity to explain the work of the Ministry to members of the public and to discuss current policies and opportunities with front line staff... the atmosphere was terrific... a surprising number of children attended... and found the cats strategically around the courts... lots of new contacts to test future ideas..." **Andrew McNeill, MOJ**

"Excellent forum for different organisations to meet each other"

Member of the public



The Samaritans exhibit at Brent



Croydon: finding out about being a magistrate



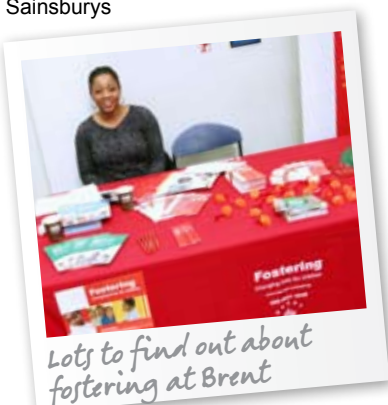
Learning about Legal Aid



Nobody leaves empty-handed at Richmond



Barnado's informs Croydon visitors



Lots to find out about fostering at Brent



Families Need Fathers – busy at Stratford

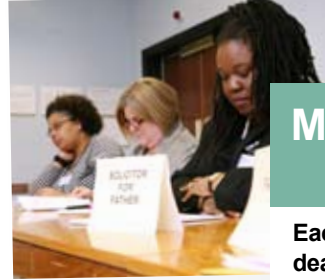
and across the four courts consisting of
er professionals, along with 25 exhibitors.



Lots to discuss at Stratford's mock court



Witnessing a hearing at Croydon



A taste of proceedings at Brent

Mock hearings

Each court held mock hearings dealing with an Interim Care application, an application for an Emergency Protection Order and a Contested Contact hearing (?)

For most visitors the highlight was the series of mock hearings. These were repeated several times during the day, at which people could get a sense of the complexity of cases, and the amount of time and care devoted to each one.

A young, local journalist was riveted to the spot during the mock interim care hearing. Everybody asked excellent questions. In some of the courts there was standing room only, until people were encouraged to sit behind the justices. One little girl sat nonchalantly in the Chairman's chair.

"I live locally and it was so useful and interesting – I'm interested in applying to become a JP." Member of the public

"I was impressed – as a university student I found the mock hearing fascinating and it was great to see such a range of professionals available." University student

Emergency Protection Order (EPO)

A DVD recording told the story of an Application for an inter-parties EPO for Baby Zac who had suffered non-accidental injuries. Background noises created the atmosphere behind what they said had happened. The recording was stopped for the audience to say how they assessed the evidence and to make a decision. Legal Advisers and District Judges were on hand to add details and assist in the decision making. The decision made by the public was unanimous – remove the child into foster care but arrange contact for the mother. EPO granted.

"It was illuminating, and I definitely gained a better understanding of the difficult decisions that family courts have to make."

Member of the public and
IMB Member for HMP Bronzefield

"The simple idea that these courts are rushing to take kids away from their parents is nonsense."

Local journalist

Interim Care Order (ICO)

The Bench entered a court room full of interested members of the public. The Legal Adviser outlined the procedure and every detail of the case was explained. The Local Authority legal representative was present, as were local practicing lawyers and the Guardian. At the conclusion of the scenario members of the public asked extremely relevant and sensible questions. What was an Interim Order? How did the Local Authority go about finding foster parents? What assessments could be ordered? What role did the Guardian play? What would happen at the next hearing when the case returned to court? The bench explained that they would give reasons orally and in writing for their decision.

"Excellent - A full examination of issues to inform the public."

John Thornhill, Chairman,
Magistrates' Association

"Really interesting to see the organisation of the court."

Member of the public



An attentive audience at Richmond's mock court

Over 50 children attended and participated in quizzes, drawing and poetry competitions, viewed the mock courts and interacted with Dads' Space.



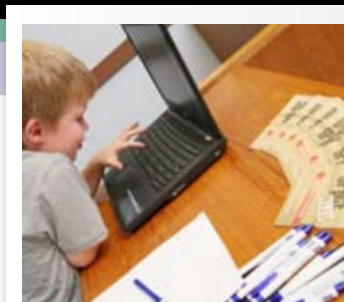
Hunting high and low for Crystal the court cat



Family was the theme for colouring and poetry



Children get creative



Young minds get to work

The children took part in the game 'Find Crystal – the court cat'. Also popular were colouring and poetry competitions and the children's quiz.

“The cat spotting idea was genius, the kids dragged parents to every corner of the court.”

Member of the public

Dad's Space 1-2-1 is a new website designed for parents and children who are separated to stay in touch. Where there has been domestic violence the child or resident parent may not be or feel safe for contact arrangements to be in place. Dad's Space 1-2-1 can provide a safe contact solution where risks are high and contact has been requested.



Drawing by Nathan, age 7



“Dads' Space 1-2-1 Service is an excellent idea and one which I have disseminated to the judges here.” HH Sally Williams, Kingston-upon-Thames

Going head to head with dad: a young court-goer connects with Dads' Space



Family means everything to me it
Aunties and uncles are very close because I can't get around they help me till I do
Mummy means everything to my life
I Love my family and they love me
Love will always exist in my family
Yes I Love them and they love me

Poem written on the day by Shawana, age 10:

Family means everything to me it is how I succeed.

Aunty's and Uncles are very close because when I go to a post and I can't get around it, they help me till I do and I don't boast the most.

Mummy means everything to my life.

I love my family and they love me.

Love will always exist in my family.

Yes I love them and they love me.