



**FAMILIES NEED
FATHERS**

Mckenzie

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ISSUE 80

The National Magazine of Families Need Fathers

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AVALANCHE?

The Times they are campaignin' as the Tories start to turn



The causes of Shared Parenting and Family Justice have gained national recognition from both Westminster and the national press, in a flurry of activity for Families Need Fathers - a culmination of many months and years of dedicated campaigns and lobbying.

On Monday July 7th, The Times launched its Family Justice Campaign headed by Camilla Cavendish, a journalist who has investigated and publicised the shortcomings of the family justice system since 2006. Under the heading "Family courts: a call for justice" The Times' daily supplement T2 began a series of articles examining the state of Britain's family courts: the secrecy surrounding them, the difficulty of reporting their activities, the lack of accountability and the subsequent impact on the lives of thousands of families.

Ms Cavendish described the first case study she had encountered, which began with a mother contacting social services with concerns

about her daughter being abused, and ended with the same woman leaving the country because she could no longer bear to live so near a daughter she was now barred from seeing. The story may not be entirely familiar to Families Need Fathers, but "the reliance on experts who have never met the accused.", "the stormtrooper



Image by Pricilla Coleman

behaviour of some social workers.", "the legal aid solicitors acting for parents who are always in a rush." and the men and women "desperate to be given the chance to prove that they were good parents" undoubtedly are. The Times clearly identified the devastating consequences when family courts get it wrong, observing that "they "convict" on a balance of probabilities, rather than beyond a reasonable doubt. A lower threshold is thought acceptable because civil courts cannot send people to

NEW CONTACT SANCTIONS IMINENT

The long awaited remaining provisions of the Children & Adoption Act 2006 Part 1 are finally to be implemented in the second half of 2008, as announced on July 1st in a ministerial statement to the Commons by Children's Minister Kevin Brennan MP and Bridget Prentice MP. The provisions are intended to ensure more contact between children and their 'non-resident parents' by giving courts greater powers to enforce orders. They are designed to lead to closer monitoring of contact orders and stringent, but more responsible and realistic, punishments in the case of a breach. The remaining provisions will also introduce court-ordered 'contact activities' in order to scrutinize, improve or re-establish relationships between children and parents. Although the provisions have taken some time to be brought into action, they were a key lobbying success for FNF on the 2006 Act and have the potential to be a major step forward for our members.

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ARE YOU ON YOUR CHILD'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE?

TURN TO PAGE 5 NOW!

DATA PROTECTION REMINDER

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FAMILIES NEED FATHERS

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From the Chair

One of the well wishers who wrote to me on my appointment as Chair on 22 May said, in the first sentence, that I had a very hard act to follow. It was not altogether clear to me if that was a warning or a compliment. My predecessor, John Baker, and I have served FNF for about the same length of time but hitherto he has been the dominant force in the charity. His charisma has led FNF during difficult and challenging times and he has left the chairmanship stronger than he found it. During his time in office FNF gained in public recognition and esteem. The charity is now a serious player in reform; witness our presentation to Conservatives in mid July (p15) when all the shadow ministers dealing in family matters attended or were represented. I ask FNF members, and thousands of children and parents not in FNF but who we have helped, to join with me in applauding John and his achievements.

It is always good to ring changes and I come to the post from a different, but complementary, perspective. Firstly, I am the first non-London based Chair. I live in northern Lincolnshire. I do not have a branch base or close-by support. In this I think I belong to the majority of members and I shall make it a priority to enhance services to people who seek help in an individual fashion. I believe that the administrative regions of England, with Wales, Scot-

land and Northern Ireland have much to offer in the expansion of FNF services and I want to develop that theme. I am delighted that our relationship with such bodies as the local Family Justice Councils, Cafcass, NACCC and SureStart centres are growing in strength. I am a strong believer in change from the bottom up. This does not detract from our very successful lobbying and I am very pleased that John Baker, with Craig Pickering, have agreed to continue to exert their influence on government bill drafters and the departmental spokespeople. 365 MPs signed the EDM on shared parenting in 2005 and we will not let them forget that at the next election.

Jon Davies and the professional office and home based staff are the anchor for all this activity. Running a charity is no simple business and we are lucky to have such a dedicated team. For too long FNF was bereft of day to day housekeeping and, thanks to Jon, we are finally getting on top of all the rules and regulations. As we grow the office will be able to take responsibility for more and more of our services. The Helpline now has professional guidance and soon our IT support services will go to out to professional tender. With ever increasing journalistic influence, our excellent and developing website and a bank of research being compiled, the FNF office is beginning to be the first port of call for



Editorial Nick Barnard

Welcome back! It's been a long wait since McKenzie 79, and between Father's Day, the Embryology Bill, the Joint FNF-Conservative Party and a new Chair for Families Need Fathers, we've had plenty to keep us busy - and plenty to fill these pages. We've gone for a bit of a redesign, but hopefully it's still the same old McKenzie you know and love (do let me know what you think - editor@fnf.org.uk). One of the best things about working for Families Need Fathers is that we

get to meet and talk to the people we work for every single day - and I want that to be reflected in McKenzie. Our next issues will be out at the end of September and the beginning of December, so if you've got something to contribute - a letter, an article, a photo or just the latest daft move from the CSA - then get scribbling. We'd also like to give a big thank-you to Alastair Burn and Julius Hinks, who have been volunteering at the office in the few past months. Spiffing work, chaps...

REMINDER: THE ONLINE MEMBERS' AREA PASSWORD HAS CHANGED - SEE THE REVERSE OF YOUR LOCAL BRANCH MEETINGS SHEET FOR THE NEW DETAILS

Charles Kenyon

researchers and media enquires into family matters. Networking is a fine art in the charitable sector and those at the top get the funding and the respect. I believe that FNF is not too far from that position now.

But for all this, the kings of the field are the active branch and group members who take the charity out to

those who need it most. And I am going to include in their number the people who are mediating the chat rooms, doing their stags on the chat line and running the parenting workshops. You are the people who deal with the problems day to day, who see the iniquity in the system and who pick up the pieces time after time, knowing that it should not be like this. I do a bit on the telephone – not helpline but referrals – and I know how incredibly wearing this is. Your dedication is remarkable and FNF owes its cutting edge, which it must never lose, to your efforts. Thank you and a specific thank you to all the local leaders, chairs and secretaries, across the country without whom the broad base of support would not grow.

Finally, a word on Litigation Support, whether through McKenzie Friends, as Litigants in Person or, most importantly, advice on how to keep out of Court altogether. FNF acts as an emergency service for many. Recent legal funding decisions will mean that more and more people will be attending Court without legal advice. Whilst to some this might be seen as an advantage, it is a fact that presentation is the key to success.

Last year a letter concerning a court case contained material which caused one of the participants in the action to seek damages against Families Need Fathers. Families Need Fathers' Trustees agreed that the matter should be settled in order to minimise the risk to the charity. In the past few weeks damages have been agreed, the original correspondence withdrawn and an apology made.

Whilst matters like this are regrettable there is always a potential for such things to happen in a charity. Trustees always strive to reduce the risk and, by applying the lessons learnt in this case, will continue to do so as a top priority, in order for FNF to continue its valuable work for the benefit of children and families.

Charles Kenyon

- FNF Member since 1989,
- Nine years as Trustee,
- Married with two children, one at university, one at school,
- Former army officer, property landlord and food and farming PR business,
- Chair of theatre and almshouse charities,
- FRSA, Member IoD, IoF Certificate in Fundraising Management.



Judges, like anyone else on first meeting, remember what you look like and how you behaved before remembering what you said. Helping people to help themselves is something we really know about and we have some first class practitioners. It is a priority of mine to get a training programme going for Litigation Support; as ever these things have to be funded but I know where there is a will there is a way.

I want to start campaigning. I want a series of time limited and relevant campaigns that can involve everyone. Personally, I am not a great demonstration person but targeted literature, local radio, good media PR and a coordinated approach can do a great deal to bring an issue to a head. Timing is important. For instance, when the Parental Responsibility measures for equal representation come in next year, we need to be shouting "get your PR sorted." We probably have time for a campaign before that - let's have some ideas please.

I am trying to get round as many branches as possible and hope that those who don't know me will meet me then. Until then, best wishes to all.

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Cafcass South slammed by Ofsted

Following the February report in which Cafcass East Midlands was severely criticised, the Child and Family Court Advisory Service South-East Region has also received a damning report from Ofsted. Of particular concern was excessive delay in private law cases, an "inconsistency" of assessment criteria, a "lack of demonstrable assessment" and substandard case management, with over 60% of private law case records being deemed inadequate. Furthermore, Inspectors noted that "Family Court Adviser's practice is not supported systematically by knowledge which is based on research and best outcomes. Instead, service delivery is determined by the individual experience of Family Court Advisers or that of their immediate colleagues" and that "It was not possible for inspectors to identify how Family Court Advisers reached their conclusions and moved their thinking from assessment to a recommendation to the court." Responding, Anthony Douglas Cafcass chief executive, said: "Our public law work is good and the problems in our private law practice are being urgently addressed - I can already guarantee significant improvements." The report was preceded by a meeting between Ofsted and local FNF members, coordinated by trustee Fairless Masterman, and can be downloaded in full from www.ofsted.gov.uk. **Nick Barnard**

CSA Sued Over Mistaken Identity

Gavin McEwen of Surrey is suing the Child Support Agency after they sent a letter mistakenly claiming he had fathered a child by another woman. His girlfriend, Louise Roughneen, opened the letter and promptly left their home, not returning for 11 months. Mr McEwen claims he underwent "substantial" mental distress and has no memory of the first nine days, and as a result is suing the CSA for damages. The case is adjourned and, as well as joining him in his claim, Miss Roughneen is seven and a half months pregnant with their second child. **JH**

Noon - Thursday 24th July 2008. C-MEC (Child Maintenance & Enforcement Commission) officially came to life. See McKenzies past for the background - see McKenzies future for the results...

Contact Sanctions - continued from front page

From "autumn," courts will be able to assign Cafcass officers to check whether contact orders are obeyed. Those who break such orders may have to do unpaid work, for up to 200 hours in extreme cases. This form of penalty is intended to replace fines, a sanction that can cause hardship for children as well as offending parents, and encourage more respect for contact orders. In addition to extra enforcement powers, "contact activities" are to be used when a court is deciding whether to implement, vary or retract a contact order. They include "programmes, classes and counselling or guidance sessions" where those with contact can strengthen relationships, improve their parenting skills, and demonstrate that they are not just responsible parents, but have a vital contribution to make to the upbringing of their children. The Children's Department is consulting separately on a subsidy regime for parents on low incomes who participate in these activities and programmes. It is hoped that both developments will make a real and positive difference to the lives of separated families - see future McKenzies for more on the implementation. **JH**

IoW school told not to breach orders

As a result of an Isle of Wight father having a contact order broken, the isle's Local Authority Legal Department is to issue guidance to schools. By requiring schools to take an active role, the guidance aims to ensure that contact orders involving contact from the end of the school day are not broken.

The father concerned repeatedly had his Staying Contact Order broken by his ex-wife picking his son up early from school. He filed a formal complaint to the Local Authority, citing sections from the UN Convention on Rights of the Child which places duties on local bodies, such as schools, to be active in maintaining relationships. Consequently, the Isle of Wight Council issued strong guidance and is working on a protocol for the Court Service to inform when orders are issued that may involve schools.

The guidelines state that "if the order has been provided and checked, the school (which will have been advised by the Local Authority) should ensure that the court order is complied with." The father told McKenzie that he feels that the guidance "should be implemented nationally" as it "has the potential of reuniting many children with parents whose orders have been wilfully broken." **Julius Hinks**

Law Society Fined

The Law Society has received a £250,000 fine for failing to sufficiently improve the system for handling complaints against solicitors. While the Law Society's Consumer Complaints Board has decried the penalty as "wholly unreasonable" and "outrageously disproportionate," the consumer group Which? has commented that the Society has let down those it was "supposed to be looking out for" by not taking their complaints seriously. After years of consumer frustration regarding client's complaints, the Commissioner's post was created in 2003 with powers to penalise and set targets. This is the first such fine that has been imposed. **JH**

Gang Culture 'Replaces Family Life'

Family life has been replaced by gang culture of violence and drugs, says Barbara Wilding, Chief Constable of South Wales. In a speech at King's College in London she stated that in urban "extreme deprivation," children are swapping loyalties from their families to "almost feral groups of very, very angry young people." She highlighted that many had experienced family breakdown "and in place of parental and family role models, gang culture is now established." Chief Constable Wilding stated that social and economic issues are major causes that need to be tackled to prevent such destructive behaviour. However, she also expressed doubts about the approach to change, claiming that "...there is no appetite for solutions that have no visible return and no patience for any which will not bear immediate political fruit." **JH**

I'm The Daddy! (It's Official)

Are you missing from your child's birth certificate, even though you have parental responsibility? Read on...

Following changes made to the Children Act 1989 which resulted in unmarried fathers who jointly registered their children's (post Dec. 1st 2003) birth automatically having parental responsibility, FNF was prompted to make enquiries about re-registering births which preceded that cut-off date – would re-registration of the birth lead to the father gaining automatic parental responsibility? The answer is a qualified 'Yes'.

First of all, in such a situation, you would either need the mother's agreement or an order of the

court. Now, if you were likely to get the mother's agreement for re-registration it's quite likely that she would already have been predisposed to make a parental responsibility agreement with you anyway. Secondly, although you are legally allowed to re-register the birth in order to add the father's name (and thereby have the father gain parental responsibility for the child whether or not the child was born after December 2003), where the father's name is already on the birth certificate you cannot re-register the birth. So, pre-December 2003 fathers who already have their name on the birth certificate cannot utilise re-registration as a means of gaining

parental responsibility.

But... what if we turned the telescope around and looked down the other end? We had been focusing on parental responsibility and how to gain PR by utilising the birth certificate registration. Looking back, from the parental responsibility end towards birth registration, we discovered something we hadn't seen before. A father who already has PR (perhaps by court order) but whose name does not appear on the child's birth certificate can apply to the Registrar to have the birth re-registered to include his name as the father AND, because he has PR, there is no need to get the mother's agreement. We suspect that there are quite a number of members with PR who would dearly love to have their names added to their children's birth certificates. So, give it a shot – and please, let us know how you got on and how you feel about this.

Steve Stephenson

CERTIFIED COPY Pursuant to the Births and		OF AN ENTRY Deaths Registration Act 1953	
BIRTH		Entry No. 99	
Registration district Tottenham	Administrative area City of Tottenham	CHILD	
1. Date and place of birth Thirteenth March 2001 St Saviour's Hospital, Tottenham			
2. Name and surname John CHILD		3. Sex Male	
FATHER			
4. Name and surname John MAGIC		6. Occupation Sales consultant	
5. Place of birth England			

Your Name Here!

"It may be helpful to mention that where the parents are not married to each other and parental responsibility has been obtained under by way of a Parental Responsibility Agreement or under Section 4 of the Children Act 1989 one parent may apply for re-registration."

General Records Office

Kids In The Middle

Families Need Fathers is extremely pleased to be working with our partners Fatherhood Institute, Relate and One Parent Families to launch Kids In The Middle, the national debate on the services provided for separating families and their children. We all recognise the issues facing separated families, and their children in particular, and the pressing need to support them better. We are also especially privileged to have Britain's premiere agony aunt Deidre Sanders as the spokesperson for the debate, and are sure that her many years of helping families through tricky times will prove invaluable. At the heart of our debate is our online survey for both parents and children, with the focus on what services separating parents and their children need.



kids in the middle
THE NATIONAL DEBATE ON SUPPORT
FOR SEPARATING FAMILIES

You can participate in the debate by taking the survey at:

www.fnf.org.uk/get-involved/kids-in-the-middle

Over the next few months we'll be sharing what we've found out, and making proposals for how the UK can give separating families and their children a better deal. Families Need Fathers members can also participate in the debate in our online forums. Visit the FNF Chat Forums and tell us which services made a difference when you separated - and which ones you wish had been available to you and your children.

So far Kids In The Middle has been featured in The Sun, The Independent, The Guardian and Metro, and we hope more coverage is on the horizon.

There's also been a bumper crop of media coverage for FNF since McKenzie 79, so we thought we'd give you a quick round up of where we've been seen (and heard)... See the box above right.

FAMILIES NEED FATHERS MEDIA DIARY

May BBC Radio Solent, BBC Radio Scotland, Liverpool City Talk, BBC Radio Berkshire, BBC World Television News,

June Telegraph, Times, Cumbria News & Star, Daily Mail, BBC Radio Five Live, Sunday Express, Sky Web Radio, London LBC Radio, Liverpool City Talk, London Taxi Magazines, Grandparent Times, Reading Evening Post.

July Sun, Independent, Guardian*, Metro, Community Newswire (Press Association's third sector service),

**including an appearance in the film section! Have a look at www.delicious.com/familiesneedfathers to find out more, and to see lots of other FNF-related articles.*

VOLUNTEERS WANTED FNF CYMRU

Wales has always been more in favour of shared parenting than England – for all that there is still a long way to go. Before the Children Act, for example, there were court circuits in Wales that gave 'joint custody' to both parents as a matter of routine, unless there was a reason not to do so. In many parts of England such orders were unobtainable.

We want to build on this, and develop more FNF work in Wales, developing branches and possible setting up an independent organisation. Some groundwork has been done; we have an active Cardiff branch; there are lots of possibilities with the Welsh Assembly and possibly funding to be had for one or more employees.

We need members of a 'steering committee' Can you help? E-mail mckenzie@fnf.org.uk or contact the office.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Many thanks to everyone who has renewed or updated their membership in the last few months - your subscriptions are the key to FNF providing and improving its services across the country. If you, or someone you know, would like to renew their membership, or update their subscription to the current rate and hasn't already received a letter from us, please contact the FNF Office and we'll be delighted to send you everything you need - including a post-paid envelope.

Contact: FNF, Studio 212, 13A Curtain Road, London EC2A 3AR
fnf@fnf.org.uk 02076135060

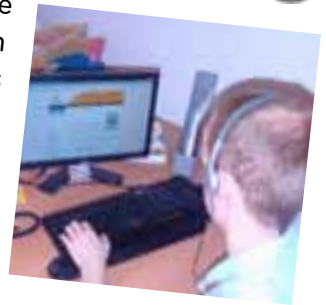
NOTICE BOARD

KEEP RECYCLING!

Many thanks to all who have returned printer cartridges and mobile phones - so far £271.25 has been raised! Contact the office to find out how you can get involved.

HEAR HEAR!

Your favourite magazine is now available online for the world to hear! Although McKenzie has been available to members online as a PDF, and also to partially sighted members on audio CD, for some time, you can now listen through your browser or subscribe to our Podcast at the click of a mouse - you may even be listening to this noticeboard item being read out right now!



Made possible by the RNIB's transcription service, from July 14th the most recent issues of McKenzie have been available to listen to in your browser with our specially integrated media player, download to listen later or to subscribe to as a Podcast - so you can automatically have the latest magazine downloaded to your computer as soon as it is updated.

You can try out the McKenzie Online Audio service here:

www.fnf.org.uk/publications-and-resources/mckenzie-audio

Whilst the service has been primarily produced with blind and partially sighted members in mind, we hope that many of you will find it a useful way of keeping with McKenzie and FNF. Please also note that, whilst the main McKenzie archive is only available to members, the audio service is open to the public - so please spread the word to those who may be interested.

Families Need Fathers' first Patron, the Right Hon David Blunkett MP had high praise for the new service, saying "This is an innovative, positive and very welcome move. It brings access and alternative formats into the practical world of people's own lives, struggles and emotions. Whilst some are talking about equality and accessibility, Families Need Fathers is acting on it - making it a reality rather than just an aspiration. They deserve every credit for this." Thanks are also due to Colin Bennett, a longstanding member who has been the link between FNF and the RNIB and a key contributor in making this possible.

AGM NOTICE

The Families Need Fathers Annual General Meeting will be held at the Manchester Conference Centre (Weston Building, Sackville Street, Manchester M1 3BB) on Sunday September 27th. We are extremely pleased to announce Eleanor Fowler, CEO of the National Youth Advocacy Service, as our first guest speaker.

Further details, including trustee nominations and your voting entitlements are enclosed in your McKenzie envelope.

For further copies, or to find out about the venue and transport, please see www.fnf.org.uk/news-and-events/events or call the FNF office on 02076135060.

McKenzie Friend Training

FNF Chair **Charles Kenyon** reports from what we hope will be the first of many events supporting those who wish to support others.

Emlyn Jones, Chair of Wirral Branch, organised a McKenzie Friend training day on 26 April which followed an extensive background reading programme. Members attending included FNF volunteers who could become available to help cover the ever increasing workload of assisting Litigants in Person in the local courts. A factor behind the organisation was the working relationship between Chair Wirral Branch and the Judge chairing the local Family Justice Council, who recognised the unique contribution FNF Wirral Branch makes to the pursuit of fairness for children who find their parents disputing in the local Family Courts. Emlyn made a particular point emphasising that the role of a McKenzie was to get the best arrangement for the children and that, whilst the McKenzie assisted the parent, s/he did not represent them; they remained Litigants in Person.

The programme opened with an in depth examination of the role of Cafcass and that a common understanding and agreement of goals with Cafcass is a vital element in the arrangement of the case. The local Cafcass manager talked about the Cafcass National Standards concentrating on: Care and Risk, Early intervention, Ascertaining the child's view and the effects on child of delay. He emphasised that everything written had to be focussed exclusively on the benefit to the child and that the form C1 had to be completed accurately as it is the content of this form that triggers any involvement of Police or So-

cial Services if accusations are made.

From National Council, Charles Kenyon said that it was now agreed with Cafcass that, in an interview, a parent can ask for an assurance that the Cafcass officer supports Shared Parenting and that notes can be taken. A third party may be present too if cleared with Cafcass beforehand. In addition it was agreed by all that an OFSTED link with FNF is vital for accurate Cafcass inspection reports. Ruth Glover, also National Council, covered the provisions of the 1989 Children's Act and 2002 and 2006 updates. She emphasised the often forgotten Paramountcy principle and qualified this by stating that children are due what they need, not what they want. A case built on children's wants should be treated with caution, as should children's views on the other parent.

The scope of Section 8 orders were explained in detail and some vital points highlighted. Chief amongst these were two matters: a Residence order must precede a Contact order and the difference between Shared Residence and Shared Care. Although the former was the intention of the Children's Act, confusion with half and half time share care had made the order almost unused for many years. Now, with better explanation, not least by FNF, Shared Residence is becoming more common. Finally, Ruth covered the potential of Family Assistance orders which allow Cafcass, amongst other Social Services, to take a more active role in guiding solutions and the differ-

ence between the Cafcass s7 reports and Social Services s37 reports.

Emlyn then introduced the ECHR provisions for a Fair Trial, a startling indictment of the conduct of Family Courts. These relate not only to criminal cases but also to civil proceedings where people argue disputes between themselves. Specifically are the rights to 'Equality of Arms' – or that both parties be given reasonable opportunity to present their case. One parent may not be at a substantial disadvantage to the other in court and freedom from self incrimination during investigation ought to be ensured. On both these counts parents without equal legal representation and who self complete C1 and associated forms lay themselves open to discriminatory Finding of Facts. It is a commonly held view that a person is judged less by what they say than by how they appear and a Litigant in Person, without benefit of training or assistance, can be at a severe disadvantage in the completely unfamiliar atmosphere of a Court.

Following on from the unfamiliar environment, Emlyn emphasised that the first rule of a McKenzie Friend was to keep full records and notes on behalf of the LIP. The second vital duty was never to leave Court without a draft Order in writing if one has been made. The position of the McKenzie Friend had been codified recently in the President's Direction of 14 April 2008 and the presumption is in favour of a McKenzie Friend is strong. There was a warning about being directed to use the Family Proceedings Court. One scenario containing a startlingly effective illustration of being pressured into signing up to an Early Resolution agreement by an official outside a Court; an agreement that can be rushed into then stamped in Court without further ado, possibly not reflecting what the parent meant to say.

Completing a fascinating day were five situation role plays from cases in Jordan's Family Law, essential reading for McKenzie Friends: both the annual Red Book and the periodicals. The day served as a foundation course for McKenzie Friends in the Wirral area and an enlightenment for potential Litigants in Person and it was agreed that this course should be supplemented by at least one if not two advanced days. Emlyn Jones and the FNF Wirral Committee are to be applauded for this first training day which, it is hoped (and indeed planned), will precede many more on the subject of Litigation Support.

Reproduced with kind permission of Mac & Daily Mail



“Sorry love, unwanted fathers go in the yellow bags”

JUSTGIVING - JUST DO IT

Over £500 of Gary's total (see right) was raised quickly, simply and safely using Just Giving - an online service which has the added bonus of automatically collecting Gift Aid, adding an extra 28% to every penny donated. Families Need Fathers has an account with Just Giving, which is at the disposal of FNF members, their friends, families and supporters. If you would like to find out about using Just Giving to support a fundraising project, please e-mail nick.barnard@fnf.org.uk. We've also got some nifty fundraising ideas of our own for you to have a go at...



Exert yourself - People love to watch others put themselves through the mill, and they'll be pleased to cough up for the privilege. Try the classics (fun run, bike ride) or go for something a bit more adventurous like Gary - ideal for Justgiving.

Car wash - The kids can have fun joining in.

Have a BBQ - Sell burgers, cakes and beers for the grownups.

Sandcastle building contest - Work on your tan for charity.

Eating competition - Scoff ten cheese burgers and give the kids a giggle.

Stand-up comedy/Karaoke Open-Mic - Let out your inner Billy Connolly/Holiday.

Pub-style Quiz - Could be done at the same time as the BBQ for that authentic landlord feeling.

Car boot/Jumble sale - You know you didn't look at that Faberge egg that much anyway.

Coffee morning - The FNF office gets through enough coffee and cake to buy a small island

Music show - If you play an instrument why not get a motley crew together and play a gig?

Gary Sargent about to scale Britain's tallest mountain in aid of FNF. Gary, who has been a member for over seven years raised over £700 - jolly good show! See left for some more clever fundraising ideas.

If you'd like help to kickstart one of the above, or an idea of your own, speak to your branch committee, or give the office a call - 02076135060.

Dear Editor,

I think that it is probably better for someone from FNF to respond and point out a couple of errors in John Baker's article on residence orders that appeared in McKenzie 79 than for an 'outsider' to do so.

John wrongly stated that the idea of awarding residence orders to both parents could be equated with the pre-Children Act 1989 situation in which joint-custody (rather than sole custody to one) was increasingly being awarded. Rather than bore everyone with a detailed argument, it should be sufficient to remind John that it was "care and control" rather than "custody" that was the rough equivalent of the current residence order and that "custody" could more rightly be compared to the CA1989's 'parental responsibility'. Back then, as a parent having court-awarded 'joint custody' with my children's mother, but with her being awarded 'care and control', I was pretty much in the same situation as a present-day father with parental responsibility whose 'ex' has a residence order. Perhaps John is just too young to remember!

Taking the risk of being a little more pedantic (as some of those in the family justice system reading McKenzie might be), when John suggests that both parents might be given contact orders there is matter of what a contact order actually is. The Act states: "'a contact order' means an order requiring the person with whom a child lives, or is to live, to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order, or for that person and the child otherwise to have contact with each other;". So, the corollary of making contact orders in favour of both parents would be to state that the child 'lived' with both parents. Surely, it is much more straightforward to make a joint residence order in favour of both parents, as is increasingly happening.

Incidentally, the CA1989 definition of a contact order should be used in situations in which a mother responds to a father's application for increased contact with a plea during proceedings (formal application hardly ever required by the court) that she should be given a residence order as some sort of compensation, and to confirm to everyone that the child continues to 'live' with her. In such situations judges should be reminded that by making a contact order requiring a parent to allow contact, they are actually stating that that parent is the parent with whom the child lives - no residence order is required to confirm that fact, since the contact order does precisely that.

Steve Stephenson

(Secretary, Central London Branch)

The presumption of both parents

Part three in our series by John Baker looks at why children should have a legal right to both parents

Children who have been taken into local authority care, often because their parents may have abused or neglected them, have a formal right under the Children Act 1989 to contact with their parents. This can be briefly stopped by social services if they think the children might be harmed. It cannot continue unless there has been a legal hearing and the judge has been convinced by the evidence that the contact should be ended or conditions for it have been set. This conforms to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children should not be separated from their parents unless 'competent authorities subject to judicial review' decide that this is best for them. This right to contact costs social services many millions of pounds organising - and commonly supervising - the children's contact, and/or convincing the courts that there should not be any.

FNF asks that the same right be extended to children whose parents simply live apart. Here the situation is that the parent who has 'residence' of the children, either with a residence order or de facto, can control the children's relationship with the other parent. There is no law or guidance that says that he or she needs any reason, or needs to use any procedure, before putting an end to it or setting whatever limits suits them or seem to them right. Many parents in the emotional turmoil that so often follows family break up fail to put the needs of their children before their own feelings.

The excluded parent, of course, is entitled to try and rebut what is in effect a presumption that the children have no right to see her or him. They can seek a contact order. If there are no contra-indications, and if the ex does not play foul, one will be granted. It will normally take several months and cost thousands of pounds, not to mention the distress all round. In many cases those opposing a contact order, even without grounds, will do it at the states expense, via legal aid, again costing many millions of pounds.

Not every excluded parent challenges the de facto situation. Two million children are prevented from having the relationship with their 'other parent' that they would like. One and a half million parents (nearly all of them fathers) are prevented from having the relationship with their children they would like. Even discounting the distress and damage to children and parents, this is a tragic waste of good, loving parenting.

What is the case against this change in the law? As put by Harriet Harman, Margaret Hodge and others, it is this. That the law states that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration, and any other presumption would compromise that. All the social evidence is actually that, unless there are counter-indications, a relationship with both parents promotes child welfare. The DCFS even says so in official publications. So making a presumption

would not compromise child welfare, instead it would remove barriers to it being achieved. And of course the law concerning children is full of presumptions, such that they should go to school, that could in theory be decided case by case by the family courts using the 'welfare principle'. The right to both parents is an exception to the signals the state gives in most other cases.

Traditionally, children belonged to their mothers. They needed their father's money, but not his direct involvement. This is still the view of some senior judges (not to mention the CSA.) It may indeed have been the normal case when their attitudes were formed. More recently, the issue was gender politics. The children's relationship with their father was a mothers' rights issue. We should now try to put the children first.

Just before its abolition, the Equal Opportunities Commission published research into intact families. On average, mothers spend 2 hours 42 minutes a day with their children, fathers 2 hours 16 minutes. Still a gap, but a narrow and rapidly closing one. Half these families will, sadly, break up. There is no child welfare case for the 2 hours 42 minutes parent not needing a reason to exclude the 2 hours 16 minutes one. The legal presumption needs to be reversed. Instead of excluded parents having to sue for contact, those wanting to stop a child seeing one of his or her parents should have to show grounds. Please think again, Ms Harman and colleagues.

DATA PROTECTION REMINDER - PLEASE NOTE

As you will know, Families Need Fathers is a volunteer, self-help organisation. As a result, it is sometimes appropriate to facilitate help and support by putting members in touch with each other. However, some members also prefer to keep their contact details private.

When signing up as a member, whether by telephone, paper or internet, you will have been asked to indicate whether or not you wish for your contact information to be available to other members. Unless you have indicated to the contrary, should another member of Families Need Fathers wish to contact you, we will supply them with your telephone number and/or e-mail address. However, you are in no way obligated to do this.

If you are in any doubt about your current privacy status, or would like to alter it, please contact the FNF Office on 02076135060 or e-mail fnf@fnf.org.uk and we will be pleased to help.

NEW BRANCH - SOUTH WALES

We are extremely pleased to announce the opening of a new Families Need Fathers branch in Port Talbot, expanding the service we are able to offer in South Wales. As well as Port Talbot, we also hope the meeting will be useful for those living in Swansea, Bridgend, Neath and Llanelli.



The first meeting is scheduled for September 30th and those interested in attending should contact Pat Lyons on 07736 888 888.

JOB VACANCY - HURRY!

FNF is seeking a Small Grants Officer to work part-time at our office in Curtain Road writing small grants applications and building relationships with potential funders. The post will be an exciting but challenging one, for up to 18 hours a week with a salary equivalent to £22,000 p.a.

For an application pack visit www.fnf.org.uk/about-us/jobs or contact becky.sibert@fnf.org.uk. The deadline for applications is 5pm Monday 18th August.

CSA Oddities #3

Via e-mail

"I just received a phone call from the CSA, replying to my recent letter of complaint.

One of the points raised in the letter was:

'Why do you persist in telephoning me when I have told you that I only wish to deal with you by post?'

I have now lost half an hour through being needlessly wound up by them - where do I claim my compensation?"

“ NAME & ACCLAIM

Where the good apples, best eggs and top bananas get their just des(s)erts



"Kimberley Pender has been a tremendous asset to the Newmarket Branch from the day that she agreed to come to our meetings shortly after the Branch opened, some 10 years ago now. Originally with a firm in Stowmarket, she got married last year and this necessitated a move to Peterborough where she now works for Hegarty LLP Solicitors. This has been an asset to us as moving north has enabled her to attend our newly opened Cambridge Branch as well. She comes to each branch once a quarter and has never missed in all the ten years.

Kimberley's great asset, unlike many Family Law Solicitors, is that she is a feisty character who likes nothing better than a good scrap! She is excellent at cutting through all the peripheral time and money wasting nonsense that often goes on between opposing Solicitors and gets straight to the kernel of the problem.

This in turn ensures that Ian Tyes, our Branch Chairman & I are very confident about recommending her to any of our members, as we know that she will really fight their corner- and indeed over the years many have become her clients and she has always done a first class job for them and had many successes.

We know that we as a Branch are very lucky to have her and we would recommend her unhesitatingly to anyone in our area."

Anthony Esler - Newmarket/Cambridge

Contact Hegarty LLP at www.hegarty.co.uk or on 01733 346333.

”

Got a solicitor you think should have their praises sung? Drop us a line at mckenzie@fnf.org.uk

MEETING CANCELLATIONS - PLEASE NOTE

Summer is often a quiet time for FNF - both hosts and guests are off on their holidays, so meetings are sometimes cancelled. Please contact your branch chair to confirm your local meeting is going ahead before making plans. Cambridge/Newmarket and Stevenage meetings are NOT taking place in August.

Branch of the Month Branch of the Month

OK, so McKenzie doesn't actually come out monthly, but 'Branch of the Quarter' just sounds silly, and wouldn't be that accurate either. But anyway, we like to get out of the office when we can and come and see the great things you do for Families Need Fathers. In May we took a trip to Cardiff and had a chat with Cardiff branch Chair **Matthew Mudge**...

How long has the Cardiff branch been going?

The Cardiff Branch existed for many years under the leadership of FNF stalwart Vernon Couch, but fizzled out for a while for various reasons. I joined the Bristol Branch as the geographically nearest and, with the help of Anson Allen and others, relaunched the Cardiff Branch in April 2000. We have run things in such a way that we are always able to provide a "surgery" for those asking for help and for many years we have been particularly helped by the regular (pro bono) presence of Bristol Family Law specialists Battrick Clark.

We also regularly arrange for guest speakers to attend - past guests have included the Head of CAFCASS (Cymru), local officers from the CSA, HHJ Philip Price QC, HHJ Crispin Masterman, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Professor Gillian Douglas, Jonathan Furness QC, Oliver Cyriax, Jim Parton and John Baker. Not all invited guests have taken us up - some declining invitees include Chief Constable Barbara Wilding and the Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan. It would seem that children's rights to see their fathers and paternal families do not figure high on the agendas of South Wales Police and The Church In Wales!

How did you get involved and come to be Chair?

I was voted in as Chairman at the very first meeting of the re-constituted Branch and have been left holding the baby ever since!

What sort of numbers do you get attending and from how far afield do they travel?

At present our average attendance is between 20 and 25 per meeting, with requests for help coming from all areas across Wales and members travelling to Cardiff from Carmarthenshire and Bangor.

What's the best thing you think the Cardiff branch has achieved?

Establishing a permanent FNF presence in Wales as a source of help and advice for Welsh parents and grandparents

What are the strengths of FNF as an organisation?

What do we do well?

Our greatest strength is our members and their determination not to walk away from their children regardless of the physical, emotional or financial costs to themselves. As a group, we

are consistent and have generally stood the test of time very well. Our website is a fantastic source of information for all who may need it and regular branch meetings for members provide a huge amount of practical and moral support.

Where do we fall down? What could we do better?

In my opinion, we could have done with being just a tiny bit more militant in terms of direct action, but as things stand F4J have taken on that role very well, as Harriet Harman found out this weekend! I fear that FNF runs the risk of getting into a rut and just grinding along with the Family Law "industry". Obtaining grants involves a huge amount of work and they certainly help us run a better organisation but I worry that it might make us appear (to some) as becoming part of the establishment. If we could have been as effective (as a group) as I am sure every single member would have wished us to be over the years, FNF would no longer need to exist - this is in an ideal world, of course!

If you could be guest editor of McKenzie for one issue, what would you do?

Add a regular feature publicising the latest case law precedents and commentaries over issues like enforcing Contact Orders, Shared Residence Orders and Reversal of Residence orders. In particular, any case in which a parent (sadly, usually a mother) is robustly chastised by the Courts (as in the odd prison sentence being handed down) should be recorded and published.

If you could choose anyone to be the next patron of FNF, who would you pick?

I think David Blunkett is ideal - if ever a man had a "road to Damascus" experience over the issue of "access" to one's child(ren), in recent times it must be him. After him, Prince William - as a child of a divorced couple with a (sadly) acrimonious ending to their relationship, his perspective on such circumstances would carry a lot of weight. He also has experience of a "re-constituted" family (ie, his dad remarrying) and divorce is also prevalent in his wider family, so he will have seen the effects. I also happen to think that he's a sensible young man with his feet firmly on the ground and who would add considerable weight to both the objectives of our Charity but also our efforts to seek reasonable reform of the Family Courts and surrounding industries.

VENUE REVIEW: CARDIFF



Ambience: Village hall meets boardroom

Barstaff: Drole

Carpet: Solid

Furniture: Yes

Fruit Machine: None to be seen (+10pts)

Music: Jazz band rehearsing next door

Clientele: White linen suits with broadsheets booking hotels

Food: Not a sausage

Real ale: Brains SA (+20pts)

Wine List: Red or white, sir?

Behind The Scenes...

McKenzie finds out what two of FNF's most committed volunteers get up to on our behalf...

Craig Pickering *FNF Parliamentary Officer*

“Colin Bennett of the Brighton branch suggested to the office that I write an article about what I do for FNF. (I'm putting Colin in the frame in case anyone thinks the following is self-advertisement!) The first thing I want to say is that I work in a team, on Whitehall and Parliamentary lobbying. Jon Davies, John Baker, Becky Sibert (and before her Georgina Brereton) and I all work together on issues. And in a sense everyone in FNF is on the team. Meetings with and letters to MPs by members are a really effective way of influencing, for example: if your MP is a Minister it's a double bonus. And the same goes for communications on policy with the courts, CAF/CASS, schools and the NHS.



Lobbying takes many shapes and forms. The FNF budget doesn't allow for lavish lunches, but in other ways we use the techniques of modern lobbying professionals. We respond to all the consultations that the government issues on topics that matter for FNF members. We write to and meet Ministers: it was a landmark when James Purnell, Secretary of State for Social Security, rang Jon to say the government was publishing proposals on joint registration at birth, as we had been pressing them to do for many months. We meet MPs, sometimes on specific issues but sometimes simply to build a relationship. The Shadow Cabinet is a particular focus here currently: we need to influence them before they write their Manifesto, not afterwards.

We meet civil servants. It's important to ensure they have the right information, since they provide the advice to Ministers. We also now have regular meetings with CSA/CMEC, which is proving a valuable two way channel of communication. We are putting an increasing emphasis on working with other groups active in parenting issues: Politicians and civil servants like issues where a significant part of the outside world is agreed, and they don't like deeply controversial ones. If we are ever to get a fair system of shared costs under the CMEC regime, we will have to take other groups with us, for example. Of course, the issues covered change over time. The CMEC Bill was a major preoccupation over the winter. Joint registration will be legislated on in the next Session, all going well, and we will have to work on that. And in the longer term, I hope that we will see a Shared Parenting Act as the centre-piece of a rational and just family law.

I hope that gives Colin what he wanted, and all of you a flavour of what I do for FNF.”

Our FNF Cafcass Liaison Officer

“These are interesting times for the Family Justice System. Whilst it is not uncommon for the Judges to point to the shortfall in government funding as the key problem in the family justice system, there is undoubtedly going to be legal and structural change in the Family Courts in the next few years.

There is a need to change the polarising effect of dispute resolution involving children. Whether in mediation or litigation, there is a real risk that by the time the parties become involved in those proceedings, they have already polarised and either agreement or litigation is being conducted against a background of a high degree of acrimony. There is a need to promote shared parenting, understand parental alienation, introduce more child centric analysis into the process (rather than automatically aligning the children with the primary carer) and undertake more general research on the effect to the parents and the child of typical orders in domestic and international proceedings. Cafcass must be at the forefront of these changes. Cafcass are encumbered by legal precedent and are in a position to influence the courts. They lack sufficient funding but in certain areas they also lack understanding of key issues which often parents, especially non resident parents experience. It is only by understanding Cafcass's internal policies, education and training that we can fully understand whether our efforts should be directed at the institution or the individual welfare officers. Many of us have had quite diabolical experiences with individual Cafcass officers, but this should not prevent us from seeking to be included in the many changes that Cafcass are pioneering. As with much in the family justice system it may be simply a question of raising awareness and understanding to the key issues affecting parents in child disputes rather than criticizing and attacking the system.

This role will involve national co-ordination and I would therefore ask members who are or wish to be involved in liaising with Cafcass, or who wish to discuss matters of policy/areas of improvement (as opposed to specific welfare reports) to contact me in the first instance.”

Father's Day

Father's Day

Words and photos from dads and their kids enjoying their day to the full



... more photos on the back page...

"We had a lovely day at Marwell Zoo. The children were high spirited but well behaved. Some of the children had met each other before the day and others met for the first time. They all formed a happy group as children do and entertained each other (and their parents!) all day. Yes, the animals are fantastic at Marwell, but there was so much else for them to do as the animals were just a part of the experience. We rode on a train, played on elaborate climbing frames and in sand pits and had our faces painted as lions and tigers! A precious moment was running for cover at the end of the day as it started to rain cats and dogs. Glad it was at the end of the day! The weather was fine otherwise. We would like to say a big thank you to FNF, our financial supporters and particularly Steve Stephenson for pulling this one off. We would love to do something like this again; it really was a great success."

Mark Gill - FNF Solent

"Fathers Day arrived 24 hours early for members of the Exeter Branch as they took the opportunity to celebrate the joy, commitment and responsibility of fatherhood with other dads from a Saturday morning Dads and Kids Drop-in centre at the Whipton Children Centre, Exeter. The FNF dads were able to enjoy the fantastic facilities at this National Children's Home-run centre whilst, through the generous funding from FNF national office, bringing Ozzie the children's entertainer and an outstanding face painter for all to enjoy. It's wonderful to see little faces light up as a small spongy ball that had only just disappeared from a hand now pops out from behind a tiny ear! Many thanks also to the Devon and Somerset Fire Service and Devon and Cornwall Constabulary who brought a tender and police car along and allowed the children to climb all over their shiny vehicles whilst learning a bit about what do in their day job. A most enjoyable day that signalled the start of long term relationship between the Children Centre and Exeter FNF." **Ian Tyers - FNF Exeter**

"The Manchester FNF group in partnership with Sure Start enjoyed a day of fun activities celebrating the importance of dads in their children's lives. It wasn't only biological dads we were celebrating, but all men representing a positive role model children. There was a bouncy castle (I did manage to 'test' it before the children arrived!), basketball & football, health information, fresh smoothies, food, kids activities (badge, picture &, portrait making, face painting) and even tai-chi for Charles Kenyon to have a go at. The local fire service and police attended with a fire engine and a police motorcycle and a 'talking wall' was available for ideas for services to involve parents. A great day for everyone, it was beautiful to see fathers and children really enjoying themselves and to make productive links with local children's services."

Jason Kennedy - FNF Manchester

"We had a great time at Grafham Water, with a group of four dads, five children, one partner and one sibling. The first half session was 'high ropes' - climbing 20 feet in the air and walking along wobbly planks and ropes and poles with a safety cable attached for when you slipped - scary but safe! Second half was raft building - each family had four barrels, some poles and some rope and a limited time to design and build something to float! Out on the lake for a race things got competitive then with attempts at boarding and tipping over other boats and the 'lifeboat' also got involved in capsizing the leader - fine for us as we were second! Then people dived in and tried to undo the knots holding our raft together as we were winning - got very wet but great fun all round! The staff were happy to keep going past the 5:30 finish to allow us time to complete the course. Everyone had a great time and want to do it again!"

Ian Tyers - FNF Cambridge/Newmarket

The 12th annual Central London Branch Thames Boat Trip was blessed with sunshine, and a crowd of over 200, picnics in tow, weighed anchor at Lambeth pier. Our very own Harry Potter kept us in balloon poodles and disappearing tricks and Becky Sibert-Gaudi and companion made good with the facepaints, as our mighty craft cruised past the Tate Modern, Big Ben, London Eye and Millenium Dome. A bumper crop of raffle prizes were dished out just as the happy crew made it back to dry land, with just enough time for an ice cream and a stroll home under the Waterloo sunset. Splendid.

Nick Barnard

"On a sunny and blustery Father's Day two Brighton dads and their boys, six and three, joined the thousands cheering on the cyclists finishing the London to Brighton bike ride."

The sea air brings on the appetite so a bowl of noodles were devoured for lunch before the four went to explore the wonders of the deep ocean at the Sea Life Centre."

Shane Clancy - FNF Brighton





Joint Registration plans recognise that both parents matter from birth

A White Paper published at the beginning of June by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Work and Pensions has proposed new requirements for the birth registration of children. After several years of related campaigning by FNF, 'Recording Responsibility' proposes that both the mother and father of a newborn would be obliged to be entered on the birth certificate unless the registrar deemed it 'impossible, impractical or unreasonable'. The process of registration would also be streamlined and increased information provided, to assist understanding and encourage parents to register voluntarily.

Each year 45,000 children are registered with only one parent's name on the birth certificate. A father who is not named on a birth certificate does not have Parental Responsibility in law, and thus is not party to crucial decisions about a child's upbringing, including schooling, medical treatment and religion.

FNF therefore applauds proposals to promote the close involvement of both parents, and agrees with 'Recording Responsibility' that 'engaging fathers around the time of their child's birth, including through being registered as father, is important in establishing that close involvement.' To read more on the White Paper, please see www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/jointbirthregistration/

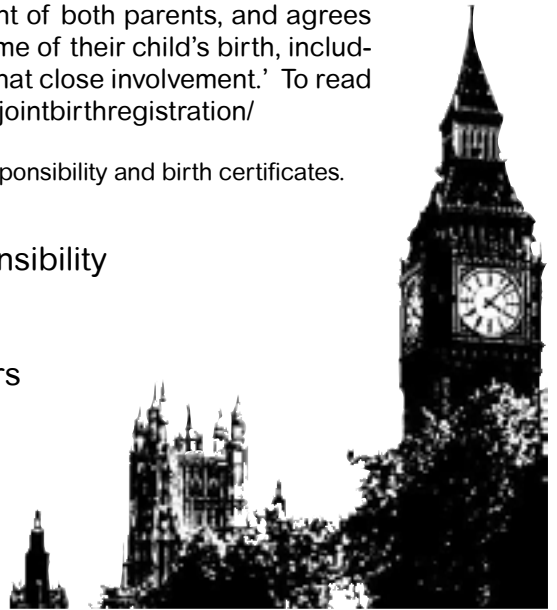
Also turn to page five for an important piece of news regarding parental responsibility and birth certificates.

6% the decrease in applications for parental responsibility orders from 2005 to 2006

1% the increase in applications for residence orders from 2005 to 2006

2% the increase in applications for contact orders from 2005 to 2006

Source: Judicial and Court Statistics 2006, now available online at www.justice.gov.uk/docs/judicial-court-stats-2006-tag.pdf



Ministry of Justice Complaints

The current complaints process run by the Ministry of Justice - including the work of the Office for Judicial Complaint (OJC) and the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman - does not allow any way to complain about poor judicial discretion, poor decision making or unfairness regarding how a case is managed. If there are instances during proceedings where a Judge says things that are unreasonable, unfair or incorrect in law, the OJC will not consider a complaint made about such things.

Under their complaints procedures, the only route to address such matters is by appealing to a higher court, but an appeal will only be considered if you disagree with the final judgment. Additionally, an ability to appeal is dependent on your finances. Appeals are costly, and may cost tens of thou-

sands of pounds. An ability to have a complaint heard is dependent on your level of wealth. For many, this results in there being no way to raise the issue of poor standards within the Courts and provide specific examples.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) needs to reconsider why only two complaints which related to the mainstream judiciary (out of 938 complaints) in 2006/7 resulted in any action being taken. There is a growing perception that the Office for Judicial Complaint was established to show that all is well within the Courts rather than to pinpoint areas of improvement within a service which faces mounting criticism within the mainstream media. If the MoJ thought that the OJC would improve its credibility, so far that office is failing.

The guidelines that the OJC adheres to are set out in The Judicial

Discipline (Prescribed Procedures) Regulations 2006. These guidelines need to be reconsidered to include matters related to the quality of judicial decision making. The boundaries between a poor decision and unfairness, bias and discretion are too easily blurred and allow the MoJ to dismiss out of hand complaints that need to be taken forward to improve service standards within the Judiciary.

It is understandable that the Judiciary wishes to protect its rights to discretion when making decisions in Court, but this becomes unacceptable when poor decision making goes unaddressed.

Mike Robinson

What do you think? Put pen to paper to the FNF office, or fingers to keyboard at mckenzie@fnf.org.uk

From the front page

jail. But to lose your children, and for them to lose you, because a court finds that abuse is a “probability”, is a life sentence of another kind.”

Later in the week, The Times ran subsequent articles on the secrecy of family courts, the impossibility of disproving some abuse allegations, and a ten-point plan for improving family courts. These include implementing the openness recommended by the Constitutional Affairs Select Committee, an automatic right for those accused of abuse to call witnesses in their defence, disclosure of documents to all parties as in criminal procedures, an independent overseer of social services and a restructuring of Cafcass “from being an organisation that reports on the parents to the courts to one that actively promotes the parenting needs of children.”

Those accused were quick to defend themselves. Sir Mark Potter, President of the Family Division, although in “broad (but qualified)” agreement with the suggested ten-points for reform, disagreed that children lacked a voice in proceedings, citing “the guardian and lawyer expressly charged with representing their interests”, and described the system as “secret” rather than “private”. He lamented the difficult task facing family court judges, and seemed to suggest a future in which final judgements would be published anonymously, describing it as “a development to be commended and encouraged.” although not being any more specific about when or how. Anthony Douglas, Chief Executive of Cafcass, argued that “Media exposure is not necessarily a prerequisite for good family justice” but acknowledged that “it is true that more information about family courts is needed in the public domain and new proposals are under way.” whilst again not giving any concrete indications as to how this might come to pass.

Whilst the Family Justice Campaign may not be directly focussed on the experience of our members, Families Need Fathers is in total agreement with Ms Cavendish that “to sever a child from its family without due cause is licensed state oppression of the worst kind. It is, in fact, child abuse.” We therefore wholeheartedly support and give credit to The Times’ campaign. We are gratified that, after over 30 years of striving to improve the lives of separated families across the United Kingdom, the importance of an open, accountable family law system is being talked about at a national level.

As well as challenging court injunctions against family court secrecy (at the time of going to press, The Times had reported success in being able to publish the details - without identifying the children concerned - of

a case involving abduction from foster care), The Times are urging readers to write to their MPs and take part in their anonymous survey to find out the extent of the damage caused. You can take the

survey, find out more about the campaign, read previous articles and browse The Times’ directory of associated organisations (including Families Need Fathers) at

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/familyjustice>

CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

In the same week, Families Need Fathers ventured down to Westminster to bend the ear of the Conservative Party. In an operation some six months in the planning, FNF members invited their local Member of Parliament to a meeting, hosted by Andrew Selous MP, to hear the issues facing separated parents and discuss potential action. In all twelve Members of Parliament, as well as representatives of other MPs, met with FNF members, staff and trustees in the Jubilee Room at the Palace of Westminster. The group heard presentations from Jenny Cuttriss, FNF Trustee, on the experience and importance of grandparents, Richard Gregorian, FNF’s Cafcass Liaison Officer on the minefield of Leave to Remove, Andrew Casey, FNF Administrator (and Member), on the ‘Confusing-Supercilious-Adversarial’ CSA and from Calum Chace (FNF Member) on the ‘mixed bag of different models and mindsets’ which complicate the family law system. FNF Chair Charles Kenyon outlined the difficulties facing separated parents in dealing with at least five different government agencies with no common aim of shared parenting and lack of joined-up thinking, and the emotional damage and social breakdown which results when children and parents face such injustice.

In response, the Conservatives expressed support from the party as a whole, showed awareness of successful models elsewhere, such as Denmark and Australia, and recognised that a renewal of the current approach is desperately needed. A review of the Family Courts is planned and a policy document is on its way. The meeting was well received, and an ideal follow-up to last summer, when FNF held a similar meeting with members of the Labour Party, hosted by FNF Patron David Blunkett. With a general election not too far away, Families Need Fathers members, trustees and volunteers will be following up on the progress made at Westminster in the coming months, and McKenzie will be there to keep you up to date as well. You can see the full minutes of the FNF-Conservative Party Joint Meeting at

www.fnf.org.uk/news-and-events/events

Nick Barnard

Also extremely exciting for Families Need Fathers was the launch of the Kids In The Middle campaign, in partnership with the Fatherhood Institute, Relate and One Parent Families - see page five to find out more, and catch up on FNF’s recent media coverage.



Why Feminism Needs Fathers Features

Becky Sibert on how the song remains the same.

It has always seemed very strange to me that Feminists and Fathers are in such different camps. Only recently Germaine Greer presented a very controversial view of fathers in *The Times* and often men blame feminism for the huge injustice they face post-separation.

At a glance it might seem absurd that feminists and fathers could have similar aims, or benefit from working together. It is also very crude to suggest that all fathers and feminists are the same; of course that is not the case. Feminism has many waves and variations and not all separated fathers and mothers want the same, or deserve the same things. There are, however, some themes which feminists and fathers have in common. Judith Evans, the second wave feminist theorist, argues “any feminist is committed to some form of reappraisal of the position of women in society” and arguably most separated fathers are committed to reform of the institutions that prevent fathers being fathers. We and ‘they’ are looking for a change of culture. The most obvious similarity is the use of the very important word: equality. A buzzword for us and feminism, we are striving for equality and so are most feminists.

The public/private dichotomy which had been discussed in centuries of liberal theory became crucial to the feminist struggle and greater emphasis was put on the already important divide. This article supports Susan Moller Okin in her interpretation of the ‘personal is political’, which means that what happens in personal life is affected by the dynamic of power, and this shared quality of domestic and public life means that one cannot be understood without consideration of the other. It is my belief that the slogan the ‘personal is political’ has huge implications for members of Families Need Fathers.

Aspects of feminism, most specifically second wave feminism, are often consistent with the idea of equal opportunities, at least those post-divorce. Unlike family circumstances, divorces can be seen as competitions. Therefore the guiding hand of equal opportunities can be used to ensure neither side is at a disadvantage in a divorce hearing. The core idea to ensure equal opportunities offered by Lesley A. Jacobs is that settlements following a divorce should be regulated by three forms of fairness: a fair procedure, the stakes being even, the background of the case being taken into account from both sides. The emphasis made on fairness, by both fathers and mothers post-separation and second wave feminists, is an important similarity.

Chodorow, one of the key second wave feminist thinkers on the psychodynamics of the family, argues for equality within the family, which is what some of the fathers are keen to argue for. Chodorow feels that the worldwide culture of mother-dominated childrearing has led to the world being dominated by men. Her solution is to get men involved far more intimately in childrearing as it would leave mothers more free to do everything else. The idea here is if fathers, separated or not, did half of the childcare then women would find more equality in the public sphere and within society as a whole.

So, why would feminists and fathers benefit from working together? Gardiner, a feminist thinker argues that “... joint parenting is the key to feminist social transformation and subsequent discussions about today’s perceived crisis of fatherhood. Change would be better for society as well as individuals, and both women and men would welcome it because current strains in the sex-gender system have created widespread discomfort and resistance. Women are strained trying to work for wages and still be full time mothers, and, in response to alienation and domination in the paid work world, many men are coming to regret their lack of extended connection with children.” OK, so arguably not all of Gardiner’s points are fair, but ultimately I have to agree that joint parenting encourages equality for both men and women.

James P. Sterba, asked the question ‘Is Feminism Good For Men and Are Men Good for Feminism?’, He has an important argument, “...once men begin to equally share childrearing and housekeeping tasks within families, they will surely be perceived as having equally viable claims in child custody cases, and once men lose their economic advantages over women, they will no longer be regarded as having greater spending obligations either...”

Fathers are suffering from great injustices and, I’m sure feminists would agree, by changing and reforming this culture we could really change equality between men and women, mothers and fathers. Isn’t this what both camps want? This is why I am a feminist and someone who passionately believes in the presumption of shared parenting. Uniting these two camps will help to bring our families together.



Nothin' But A Gold Digger? Features

Kim Beatson of Anthony Gold Solicitors addressess pre-nuptial agreements

If, like me, your car music is dictated by teenage passengers, you may be aware of the reference to “pre-nups” in a track called “Gold Digger” by Kanye West. Now it is not so surprising that wealthy American rap stars should be aware of the value of these contracts, but it is interesting to think that they may be responsible for raising the awareness of the younger generation, whilst the rest of us are somewhat careless when it comes to financial planning.

It is a fact that an agreement entered into between husband and wife (before marriage or during marriage) does not oust the jurisdiction of the Courts. For many years, agreements between spouses were considered void for public policy reasons, but this is no longer the case. Over recent years, pre-nuptial contracts have become increasingly common and are much more likely to be accepted by the Courts as governing what should occur between the parties when a marriage ends. This is, of course, subject to the discretion of the Court and an agreement will not be upheld unless it is fair. Recent cases make it clear that such agreements are highly persuasive depending on the circumstances that led to their completion and, indeed, much more persuasive when both parties have had the benefit of legal advice.

Some of you will be familiar with the recent case involving Mr and Mrs Crossley. Both were independently wealthy at the time of their marriage (indeed, Mrs

Crossley had accumulated £18 million from three earlier divorces). Their marriage was short and childless and they had the benefit of a pre-nuptial agreement. When Mrs Crossley sought to extricate herself from the agreement in order to bring financial claims against her fourth husband, the Court of Appeal rejected her claim, making it clear that this was exactly the sort of case where a pre-nuptial agreement should be truly binding.



A Rather Sensitive Subject

More often than not broaching the subject of pre-nuptial agreements would be made by the prospective husband or wife, many of whom have a clear understanding of the merits of obtaining such an agreement. For many, this will be a second marriage and at the end of a first marriage, clients often receive advice from their lawyers as to how to avoid future pitfalls. Pre-nuptial settlements will be part of that advice.

In a wider multi-cultural and multi-national community, pre-nuptial agreements have a special place. This is particularly so in the Asian community where dowry and jewellery may form an important part of the pre-nuptial assets, often gifted by family. The pre-nuptial agreement can make it clear how these assets will be identified and distributed in the event of a marriage breakdown.

What You Will Need to Disclose

For a pre-nuptial agreement to be persuasive, it is important that both parties disclose income, capital, pension and any liabilities. The standard of disclosure should be similar to that expected on divorce.

What Criteria Needs to Be Covered

- Full financial disclosure
- Independent legal advice to both parties
- What happens to assets in existence at the time of the marriage?
- What happens to assets acquired during the marriage – by way of gift of inheritance?
- What happens to chattels (house contents) purchased during the marriage – are these regarded as joint and does the value make any difference?
- What happens to debts and liabilities incurred during the marriage?
- What happens when a child is born, when either of the parties are unable to work for medical reasons or if either of the parties are unemployed as a result of incapacity?
- When does the deed lapse? Typically the deed would lapse and would need to be reviewed after five years from the date of the marriage.

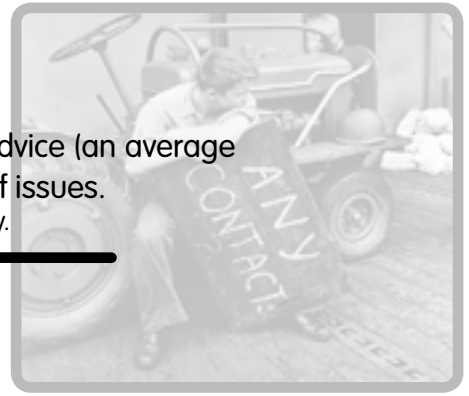


How to Get it Organised Quickly and Calmly

Give yourself as much time as possible. The case of *K v K* (2003) shows that a judge is more likely to uphold the agreement if there was no pressure to sign. Lawyers will usually advise that it is much less likely that the deed will be upheld if it is entered into less than 21 days before the date of the marriage.

The FNF Self-help forum sees a huge traffic of emails of support and advice (an average of 878 posts per month during 2007) between members on a variety of issues.

The emails reproduced below may have been edited for content and privacy.



Games not for children

Dear all, After not seeing my daughter for a month she was made available for contact yesterday. After building up a good relationship and going out of the centre in previous weeks and having some really nice moments, she would not come to me and said at one point "daddy is bad." She is 32 months. She was literally kicking and screaming to get away from me and back to her mum. It was extremely upsetting for her and me and we ended up having to stay in the centre with mother there. This all follows on from when, before the last court hearing, my daughter used to run across the car park to me. My ex hasn't responded to letters regarding contact problems/court orders, and yesterday refused to even acknowledge my being there. I really do not want my daughter to be subjected to this kind of abuse; being used by her mum as a ball in her sick game. I'm running out of ideas of how to tackle this whole problem as it seems the more I try and the more court orders are issued, then the more my ex uses our daughter to achieve her aims. It's getting to the point where I'm beginning to think about stopping, so as to stop the abuse my daughter is obviously now getting. I'm really not sure what is going to be "for the best" at this moment in time, and could probably use a little direction.

Harold

.....

Very sad to hear this. You might find that the problem is that your ex is present. My daughter is completely cold towards me until her mother leaves. Then she brightens up immediately and contact proceeds perfectly. She knows what her mother wants to see and it is not about how my daughter views me at all. Or, more precisely, she knows what her mother does not want to see - that

she truly loves her father and values her time with him.

Tony

Don't even think about "stopping" at this point. Believe it not, it is early days. Tony is right. The obvious solution is for you to have time alone with your daughter, not in Mum's presence. Is there no way to get the court to order this? Can the contact centre workers be persuaded to intercede, just to get the mother to step into the other room for a while? (I know that is difficult.) What does the court say about moving on from the contact centre? I'm really sorry to hear about this. You and your daughter don't deserve it. I know how this type of thing can grind you down, and eat away at you. You have to strive for balance, not to let it become the story of your life, just one part of it. Then it becomes less unbearable and thoughts of giving up vanish.

Steven

Really sorry to hear of your problems. I have had much the same. Unfortunately I did the wrong thing and confronted my ex wife about the alienation tactics only to find myself arrested and contact stopped. The only advice I can give you is to not follow my example and keep as cool as possible, which is extremely difficult to say the least. If you are at a contact centre I assume Cafcass are involved. If so, liaise heavily with them and most importantly keep an up-to-date diary of events which will prove invaluable in preparing statements and for use with Cafcass reports/court. Keep turning up at the contact centre and if contact does not go ahead then at least you can show you have kept your side of the bargain. Should this carry on for the foreseeable future it may be wise to think about the possibility of getting a Child Psychologist involved even though, in my opinion, it is usually the resident parent who needs it - as the child is only responding to her problems.

Brian

Contact at Xmas

I recently asked my ex wife to allow me to have contact on Xmas Day every other year, or share Xmas Day and she has come back with a flat refusal. Her reason for the refusal is because my daughter may not see her half brother and sister, who are 19 and 22. However, she has a half brother and sister with me aged three years and seven weeks. How do I go about going back to court to get an amendment to our order, and can I produce all the letters I have showing her unreasonable behaviour?

Ed

.....

It would be unfortunate to have to go back to court just on the subject of Christmas. It would be worth attempting mediation first. If you have any other contact issues to address it would be a good idea to include all of these in the process. However, if you have to go to court you would need to apply for a variation in your contact. Apply to the same level of court (i.e. Magistrates or County etc) you were at previously. Ask the court staff if they will accept a C2 application for this. They may insist on a C1.

Charlie

As your daughter's half-brother and half-sister are over 16, why not invite them over for a cup of tea and a chat next time you have contact with your daughter and suggest to them that this Xmas they are welcome to enjoy Xmas dinner at your home with their sister?

Lincoln

The Charity provides two email forums for members: FNF Self-help - this forum is for members to read, offer and ask for advice about specific situations and FNF Chat - for general discussion of topics related to the issues our members encounter.

If you wish to subscribe to the Families Need Fathers email forums please email fnn@fnf.org.uk and enter into the subject/title bar: Subscribe forums. Please include in the body text your name (as registered with us) and your postcode - as a precaution to ensure that only bona fide members are involved and state whether you wish to subscribe to one or both forums.

JOIN THE FORUMS, CONTRIBUTE AND HELP ONE ANOTHER

Thank you, FNF! Sue Secker

I first contacted FNF in 1989, when our complex family was desperately trying to work through the usual separation issues. Shocked by the ongoing and seemingly unresolvable conflict and consequences for our children, I cast around for any source of support, but found none. Then, quite by chance, I read an article about FNF in a Daily Telegraph colour supplement (I have it still), and thought "these people sound as if they understand what's happening to us... maybe they can help?"

Note that it was me that sought help, not my husband, and it was me that later joined FNF. And I am so very thankful that I stumbled across this charity. I know now that it's fairly typical for a partner or grandparent to make the first contact with FNF, and through the past years, I've been privileged to know so many decent, caring people, who simply love their children and grandchildren.



My years working for this wonderful charity have truly been driven by a passion to change outcomes for 'separated' children, and of course, their loving families. And I was so very moved by the article 'So Long, Sue' in the last McKenzie... thank you for your very kind words.

Although I am now 'retiring', I will never come to terms with the injustice, and sheer lack of common sense that pervades the aftermath of separation; the overbearing, investigative process that our just 'ordinary' non-criminal families have to face. It makes no sense at all to me that perfectly good enough parents (families) before separation should have to be assessed for suitability to remain part of children's lives afterwards.

What kind of message does that send to children? And as for the paramouncy of children's interests, how has that become so obfuscated in the UK? Why aren't children sent an unequivocal message that both their parents matter, and that they have a right to continue to be loved and cared for by their 'whole' family, especially when their parents live apart? What is clear is that I'll always be in FNF's corner, railing against the unnecessary conflict and loss our children and families have to endure.

I'd just like to say to everyone who has ever been part of this charity, whether your contribution is (or has been) huge or small, visible or invisible (for there are many unsung heroes and heroines out there): you've kept me on track, given me a purpose, and above all, supported me throughout our family's uncertain journey. What would I have done without you?

With humble thanks,

Sue Secker

READING EVENT REPORT

Helena Ross and FNF Patron Nigel Planer take to the stage for "Chrissie", a set of playlets on the experiences of separated families (right), and Garry Tinsley gives the lowdown on support workshops (below) at "Keeping Mum.. and Dad!", held at the Reading International Solidarity Centre on June 7th. The day-seminar, organised under FNF's Both Parents Matter banner, hosted over 80 social care and welfare professionals from across south-east England, who came to learn more about the



vital role that fathers contribute, how services can be tailored to be more suitable and accessible for dads, as well as the work of Families Need Fathers and Both Parents Matter. After the success of the Reading event (another well done for Sue Secker!) more similar events will doubtlessly be on their way. Have a look at our YouTube channel www.youtube.com/familiesneedfathers to see some videos of Nigel and Helena in action, as well as lots of other FNF delights.



Child's best interests

As you will know, the recent Human Fertility & Embryology Bill has changed a medical professional's responsibility when providing fertility treatment from considering the 'need for a father' to a 'need for supportive parenting', because the then-present wording discriminated against gays, lesbians and singles. However, one thing stands out that may have escaped the attention of many; I have not seen anything in the bill that refers to the best interests of the child (or the unborn child.) Considering that this principle is supposed to be paramount when deciding the future of a child's life its absence from the bill is conspicuous. The (probable) wishes of the unborn child seem to have been ignored in order to satisfy the biological and maternal instincts of people who would not be able to have a child naturally. This may be extremely distressing for the people concerned, but should not "the best interests of the child" still be the overriding principle used? If the child had a multiple choice, what type of parents would it choose?

It is one thing when an alternative family is created as a result of adverse circumstances, but quite another to make it happen by design.

Barry

A painful decision

I have been a member of Families need Fathers for 17 years and support your work. I have often heard it said that fathers (or mothers in such cases) should never give up trying to gain access to their children. So it was with mixed feelings that I read your article in issue 79 "A Public Scandal" about the experience of Dominic Cole whose case lasted 12 years.

I admire Mr. Cole's tenacity, but the mother is entrenched in her position and the court system has not brought her to book so far. My personal view is that any parent that turns a child against the other parent for no good reason is committing a form of child abuse.

I am a father who was in this situation. I went to court approximately 30 times as a litigant in person (with much thanks to the help and advice received from Families Need Fathers at that time) over a 3-year period from 1989 to 1992, and gained a number of Access Orders, Parental Rights Order etc, but all to no avail. My daughter's mother was entrenched in her beliefs that her new fiancé should be the new father to our daughter. Parent Alienation Syndrome was a fairly new term at the time, but that was the method employed to deny my daughter and me access to each other.

It was clear to me, after 3 years that the Courts and Social Services were going to allow my daughter's mother to do exactly as she liked, and at this point I made the very painful decision that for me to continue would be a waste of time under the circumstances. For the sake of my sanity I put myself onto a residential bereavement course, which gave me the tools to help me come to terms with the fact that I was unlikely to see my daughter again - although I would still love to get to know my daughter, now 19, if that were ever possible.

I feel the decision that I took all those years ago was the right one for me, as I could have easily carried on for years, becoming increasingly obsessive and bitter towards the Family Court System. Over a period of time I have grieved for my daughter, accepted the situation and have moved on. I am just a Dad who wanted to love my daughter. I am not Superman. I would be happy to receive correspondence from fathers who face or have faced a similar situation - please contact the FNF office for contact details.

Philip Edwards

A father's rights

I am a woman who, until recently, never thought about a father's rights or in fact how hard it is for them. The mother of my partner's children has said herself that he is a great father. But since the break up she now says, for no other reason than she can, that she will not let him see them. He is now going to court and paying a lot of money, resulting in both of us having to get extra jobs.

His ex-partner finds it funny as she says she has looked into the system and has found out mothers are very rarely pun-

ished if they don't do what they say. She has said openly she doesn't intend taking much notice.

So at the moment you have a couple who are broke and can't qualify for legal aid because he lives with me. I also have debts, which haven't been taken into consideration, and owing to my debt I can't afford to spend thousands of pounds. He is pursuing a seven thousand pound court case to see his children knowing that he could still end up not getting to, because she won't comply and won't start to as she knows nothing will happen. Is that fair?

She is right with her comments about being above the law which doesn't protect fathers, as courts do not go through with punishments. That's fine if you don't want them to go to prison or won't take the children away, but what's the point in threatening if nothing happens? Change it to something that will affect the mother, that will to make her comply and that you feel the court will go through with. I fully understand that there are a lot of women out there who get a really hard time once they split with a partner. But I now know that for all the women who have a hard time, there are just as many fathers who also do.

Fran

Success with McKenzie

I know that a lot of members go to the Central London meeting looking for a McKenzie friend - someone to help them fight their corner in court. I went there hoping I'd get an offer of some help in negotiating with my 11-year-old daughter's mother. I didn't want to put anyone through that court process again. And what good did the court do? Four hours contact once a month for the last four years! Yeah, maybe I could have pushed harder over the years, but Sophie's mum is really tough and won't budge. Me, I'm kind of accepting. She'd really like me out of the equation altogether.

My ex had agreed to meet with me in Finsbury Park to discuss things. I reckon she thought I was easy meat and she'd just blank me out so she even agreed to me bringing someone along if she could too. But she wanted a CV from my 'friend'. So, one Tuesday I asked a well-known face from the Central London Branch if he would come and meet

my ex on a Saturday, and he agreed. He told me it was his first attempt at 'mediation'. Having him there made all the difference. When my ex got a little mean with suggestions to gradually increase Sally's time with me there were three of us she knew were looking at her and my pal was able to say things to her that she would have challenged if they came from me.

So, in one meeting, we moved forward more than I've done in four years and for my next contact I'm set to take my daughter out for the whole day. Then we're hoping to get the interval down to three weeks.

Maybe some of those who help as McKenzie friends could think about helping with negotiations/mediation. It worked for me. A big thank you.

Luke Frederick

Never give up

I write to say "thank you" to FNF and to pass on the lessons I have learned from my experiences in the Family Court system, in the hope that they might give others encouragement and help.

I joined FNF around 18 months ago, 6 months into a residency tussle which I have just recently 'won'. The inverted commas are there because whilst I have residency of the children, the impact of the last two years on all of us has been so absolutely shattering that there can be no celebration in seeing the other party – the mother of my children and a woman I once loved – lose, no matter how badly she behaved. Furthermore, I wouldn't want to claim any significant achievement on my part in this win but I would say the following, which arise from what happened to me, and the lessons I learned.

Firstly, understand the challenge you face as a Father – the odds are stacked, massively, against you. Everybody's presumption of 'right' is with Mother. It will cost you a fortune (with or without solicitors – see later), possibly your job, your house, and your friends and even your sanity. Speak to people in FNF and find out what might happen to you. Prepare yourself for the worst, and make sure your reasons for putting yourself through it are genuine and true.

Use solicitors at the beginning, especially as things are likely to be frantic and fraught and your knowledge of the system zero. Pick their brains thoroughly, read up on the topic, make sure you are able to have an equal-footing conversation with your solicitor and you understand the key issues in your case,



then dump them.

Always be civil, polite and deferent to the officials, and never, ever lose your temper, with anybody – including your ex. I would go as far as to say that if you cannot guarantee to keep your temper, give up, as you will lose. You should have already decided that you love your children more than you hate your ex, and that should be the focus that enables you to keep calm. You are under scrutiny from day 1 – people are watching your responses to provocation, and aggression or similar will not be forgotten, understood or forgiven.

There will be occasions where you will be called upon to make snap decisions, particularly before court appearances – have a rigorous understanding of what you are asking for, and why, and make sure that you are able to cogently present your points. Practice with family and friends – get them to try and pull your reasoning apart. Preparation is key, and if you are not sure, ask yourself the golden question – what is best for the children? Keep this question at the front of your mind, and most of your subsequent decisions will be good ones.

Finally, be patient – I have come to the conclusion that the whole system is deliberately engineered to last at least 18-24 months for the average case. The courts know it can take a year or so for the separation emotions to calm down, and it's hard to sustain hatred for someone for more than a year. It's extremely expensive, and after 18 months or so, most people

are ready to make compromises just to get on with their lives and leave the whole sorry mess behind them. People just aren't ready to be civil any quicker.

Try and find someone who cares about you and your family but is fair minded and intelligent enough to see reason. So many issues are clouded by your emotions, both current and past, that 'reasonable' appears to be hostility, vice versa and all the permutations in between. I had my Mother, and for her support, sanity and reason I owe a massive debt.

If things go wrong, never give up. Do whatever you can to keep yourself in the minds of your kids – letters, presents, calls, whatever. Plan for the day when your child turns 18, finds you, and says 'Why did you abandon us?' Be able to

show them that you tried your best – it will mean so much to them. Who wants a Dad that couldn't be bothered?

I'm going to move on now – I have a family to raise – but I will always be grateful to FNF. I've met some amazing people who have come through hardships and injustices that I am fortunate enough to only try and imagine what it must be like – you were an inspiration to me and I will always be grateful.

Brendan

A short thank you

I would like to make a short thank you to some members who have helped me in my hour of need. I have been left destitute by the DWP yet again but I have my son, who is in receipt of disability living allowance, with me 40% of the time. So thank you to Eugen Hockenjos, his girlfriend Marie, Lee Glass, Jon Davies and John Robertson for their help when it was most needed. Thank you.

Stuart Young



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(Paul, an FNF member, has 25 years HR experience in the private and public sectors and will donate some of his fees to FNF)

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