

Families need fathers

Families Need Fathers (FNF) counts itself lucky to be holding a collection at Heathrow on Friday 13 June, two days before Fathers Day. More of that later, but first, who are we, what is Families Need Fathers?

Let's dispel a couple of misconceptions straight away. We are not a 'fathers' rights' organisation but rather a 'children's rights' organisation. Most of all don't confuse our responsible and respected 34-year-old Charity with those guys from Fathers 4 Justice (F4J) who got a lot of attention climbing buildings dressed as Superman and so on.

As adults, we work on behalf of our children because following separation and divorce so many of them are prevented from having a decent relationship with their fathers. Of course some fathers (not ours!) choose to walk away and show no interest in their children and most mothers allow and even encourage their children to see their fathers. But there are a minority who for a range of selfish reasons deny their children a relationship with decent fathers, and even go to great lengths to sabotage it.

Neither are we part of a gender war - don't forget that 50% of our children are girls and will be a future generation of mothers. I've been involved with FNF for over twenty years and my two daughters (28 and 29-years-old) are fully supportive of FNF, knowing that without it there is every likelihood that I would have had the stamina and mental strength to battle against all the difficulties put in my way - and I

may have disappeared from their lives.

They owe FNF a great debt - as do I. Nearly 20% of approaches to FNF come from women. These women are the children's grandmothers and the father's new partners, women who are usually much angrier with the obstructive mother than the father can ever afford to be, women who are resourceful and determined.

We are not saying that mothers are 'bad' and fathers are 'good'. The problem is that following separation one parent usually assumes 'ownership' of the children and determines everything, including whether or not they'll continue to see the other parent. Mostly this will be the mother, but very occasionally, this will be the father.

In such instances fathers are prone to behave as selfishly as those mothers, indulging their hostility by limiting or preventing the mother's relationship with the children.

I sometimes help parents with their court applications regarding their children. In the past year I've been to court with two FNF mothers, one who is divorced from a truly unpleasant guy and the other whose 12-year-old son is, largely as a result of a wicked step-mother, refusing to have anything to do with her. FNF recognises that giving one parent total control allows selfish parents to behave like this and this is why FNF promotes shared parenting.

Of course we don't come across the 'feckless fathers', the ones who are only too happy to leave their kids and the responsibility for providing for them. We don't seek to defend or excuse their behaviour.

The fathers who come to us are

**By Steve Stephenson
Secretary,
Central London FNF**

the ones who are often just clinging by their finger-tips to remain in their children's lives; fathers such as Mike, the cabbie who put in our request for a LTDA collection at the Heathrow feeder park last year, and who stumbled across FNF some eight years ago.

Last chance saloon

Mike's childhood sweetheart of many years had embarked on an affair and decided he was redundant, that he'd have to go ... as she intended to move her new-found love into their home (which he'd worked hard to pay for as a cabbie) to become stepfather to his two daughters.

Mike had already said 'goodbye' to them, accepting that from now on he'd live elsewhere, initially going back to his parents home, and that he'd see his kids at odd times. She wasn't really interested in the kids, they were just a means to get the house and child support. Mike's kids recognised this, that they were second place, a long way behind her 'new love'.

With FNF's support Mike challenged the orthodoxy that would have had him move out. His goal, and his children's goal, was that he'd stay to look after them as a single parent and she and her lover could sling their hook.

He succeeded, fighting through the courts with FNF's support - without lawyers because he could-

n't afford them. Sadly, a lot of our support has to be given to fathers battling through the courts without lawyers to help them. It's the last chance saloon, after negotiation and pleas have failed.

The kid's mother, after an initial interest, mostly to cause disruption, didn't bother to see the kids. She had her man and then 'her' money from the house. That's what she was really after.

What did we do with last year's collection? We cleared around £850. Thanks - thanks on behalf of so many children. We put some of the money towards our annual Fathers Day boat trip on the Thames - total outlay was £1600.

We used the remainder to buy a rolling LED display so that we could pass on information about future events at our meetings without causing disruption - or forgetting important announcements.

When Mike's 'ex' kicked off, Mike had no status as a parent because although they'd lived together for many years and bought a house together, he was 'an unmarried father' without parental responsibility.

One of FNF's achievements over recent years has been to change the law so that fathers like Mike, who are registered as the father on their children's birth certificate, automatically have equal parental responsibility with the mother.

We hold weekly meetings in central London every week and in Finchley once a month. If you want to know more take a look at our website - www.fnf.org.uk - or ring us on 020 7613 5060.

Thanks for your generosity and wishing you a good aim if you are planning on throwing a coin or two into our collection buckets.

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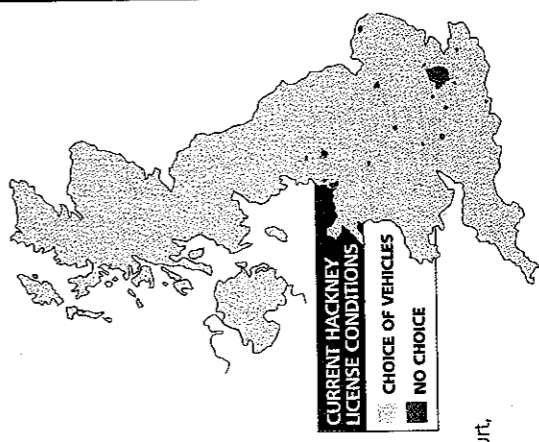
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Friday 13th / Sunday 15th June (Fathers Day)

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2	5	6	7	8	3	9	4	1
3	9	1	6	2	4	5	7	8

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