



ANY CHANGE?

McKenzie writes the new history of
Child Maintenance and meets
CMEC Chair Janet Paraskeva

PLUS BIG NEWS ROUNDUP

- Government to 'Think Fathers' • Courts to be opened up?
- Hymangate - the final act... • Contact sanctions now live



FAMILIES NEED FATHERS

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From the Chair

It is the little things that hurt most. As we come up towards the season of Christmas, cards will be arriving through the post. Those of us with children at home, delighting at the pleasure that we anticipate, will see some cards and presents addressed 'Care Of', as if the home you are making is not a real home and you are not a real parent. I always found that particularly upsetting and, 20 years later, still do. For many, of course, there is to be no such joy as family at home and this is not just for parents; grandparents too feel the pain. Over 40% of children say that, at times of family crisis, it is grandparents they turn to, rather than parents, siblings, friends or teachers. But grandparents and grandchildren have no rights whatsoever. This is deeply wrong and hurts everybody. This Christmas spare a thought for grandparents alone too.

It has been a very busy time since my last foreword. I have taken our Shared Parenting message to Cafcass, Judges, Politicians, Think Tanks and other relevant charities. I get a greater feeling of understanding, now more than ever, but we still have difficulty in getting people to stand up and support us publicly. We need to clarify our Shared Parenting message and new slimmed down guidance is being published. This is the core of our campaign and we will be testing it with politicians before the end of the month. Also to be tested are the measures for enforcement of contact provisions which come in as part of the Children and Adoption Act on 8th December and I will be talking to the

President of the Family Division to see what action is intended.

I have visited 14 branches so far. I cannot praise the work of the branch officers too much, especially the branch chairs. Whatever our lobbying success, it is you who supply the best of services, helping people to help their families and themselves. Some of the situations you deal with are unbelievably horrendous, yet you take these on your shoulders and come back next week or next month for more, having done any amount of one-to-one support in between. You have great fortitude and great will. Many people work very hard to support you but do let us know if more should be done. We have applied for grants for next year with this in mind, especially in the English Midlands and the north.

However, just occasionally, FNF can be set back by people whose ego is greater than their capability or contribution. Firefighting takes a hugely disproportionate amount of time for Jon Davies and for me and means we cannot get on with other things. So following this Christmas, may I ask that the New Year resolution for FNF be to find out what we will achieve in 2009 if no one seeks the credit or the limelight for themselves. I am sure the results will be amazing. A Happy Christmas time and best wishes for the New Year to everyone.

Charles Kenyon

Editorial Nick Barnard



Ho ho ho avid McKenzie readers and welcome to the final issue of 2008. I hope you've enjoyed McKenzie and the changes we've made this year – any comments always welcome to mckenzie@fnf.org.uk. My first year with FNF, and Charles's words above, have been a reminder of what a blessing it is that I will be able to spend time with almost my entire family over the next month – and how unjust it is

that some of you and your children have that unnecessarily denied to you. But I think we're making progress – just look at the opposite page for some changes that have occurred since even the last issue of McKenzie. Next year is FNF's 35th birthday and McKenzie will be looking back on some of things the charity has achieved in that time. Let's hope that 2009 is the greatest year of of them all.

I'd also like to extend a sincere thank you, on behalf of the National Committee as well as myself, to Fairless Masterman. Fairless stood down as a trustee at the AGM after many years of service but has agreed to stay on and give his uniquely valuable input to the McKenzie editorial committee - thank you Fairless!



News

Open the courts say Straw and Potter

Indications are that the Government and the judiciary are to take the most significant steps so far towards a more transparent and accountable family justice system. Justice Secretary Jack Straw is expected to publish a report this month which will call for changes to allow the media into family courts, with the proviso that children should not be identified and that judges should retain the discretion to close the doors. Echoing this, in October Sir Mark Potter, President of the Family Division, told The Times that the balance of protecting children "now seems to me to have come down in favour of increased openness by permitting the attendance of the media, subject to provisions to protect the anonymity of children, or indeed the parties in appropriate cases". Although the report

was not available at the time of going to press, a Ministry of Justice spokesman told McKenzie "Last year we consulted on improving the openness of family courts. We will publish our response once we have fully considered the findings. This is an important and complex area of policy about which people have strong views. We must ensure we get it right. "Children's well-being is at the heart of the family justice system. Where there are concerns about a child's welfare, a judge must decide whether any intervention in family life is justified. In any decision relating to a child, the welfare of the child is the court's paramount consideration."

See <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/article4974907.ece>

Contact sanctions finally confirmed

Following on from reports in McKenzies 80 and 81, the new sanctions against parents who breach contact orders, as laid down in the Children & Adoption Act 2006, have had their enactment date confirmed. From December 8th this year, judges will be able to hand down a number of new sentences, including unpaid work, attending defined 'contact activities', and compensation for

losses arising from the breach of orders. It is intended that the new sanctions will provide a more feasible option for judges to punish parents who break orders instead of fines and imprisonment, which have potential welfare implications for children.

See <http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/announcement301008b.htm>

'Think Fathers' urges DCSF

The Government has begun a campaign to recognise and promote the equal role of fathers in parenting. The 'Think Fathers' campaign was launched on November 13th and aims to "push forward the debate on active fatherhood" and "look at how to better support dads and encourage them to play an active role in their families." Exact details of the campaign are yet to be confirmed, but include publishing a 'Think Fathers' guide, holding a fathers' summit and "bringing together employers, children's services, practitioners and vol-

untary organisations" to support fathers. Children's Minister Beverly Hughes said "Together, we can bring home the messages to families, public services and the voluntary services that parental responsibilities should be shared equally among parents and we can reverse the outdated and out of touch assumption that dads are a bolt-on family accessory – nice to have but not essential."

See http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0254

McKenzie says... We would have loved to have reported on the above stories in more depth. They're all big news and potential front page material. However, as reflected by the brevity of the above reports, there's not actually that much to say about them – yet. So far, no lives have been changed. No children have been allowed to spend more or better quality time with their parents and wider families. This will not happen until sanctions are actually levelled against those who break contact orders, until family courts are actually more transparent and accountable and until fathers are actually given an equal role as parents by Government and by society. But undoubtedly there is hope – lots of it. As Families Need Fathers turns 35 next year, McKenzie will be looking back and answering those few who ask "What has FNF ever achieved?" These are just a few examples. There are many more, and many more to come.

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Divorcing couple may be charged for emotional harm

An Italian couple could face prosecution for the harm caused to their son during their divorce, in what is believed to be the first such case in Europe. Prosecutors have proposed that the Milanese court bring charges against the parents for inducing a "syndrome of anxiety and depression" in their 12-year-old son through the conflict of their breakup. It is reported that the parents, who cannot be identified, consistently argued and undermined each other in front of the boy, despite his complaints of the distress it caused him, in an attempt to make him decide between them. After the boy's school work suffered and a health visitor described him as "disturbed", Judge Cesare Tacconi has been asked to decide whether the parents should be held responsible. His decision is expected in December.

EU to cooperate on child maintenance

European Union justice ministers agreed a deal in October which would empower member states to enforce child support payments between parents living in different countries. It is estimated that 170,000 couples who are of different EU nationalities separate each year and the new deal would allow an application to any local court to enforce payment on an order made in any EU state. EU Justice Commissioner Jacques Barrot said of the deal, which applies to married and unmarried couples: "Parents and their children will not have to suffer diverse national systems. For each step in the process of recovering child support payments, they will benefit from aid and assistance measures. The livelihoods of a number of people, notably children, in the union depends on the payment of child support. Today's agreement, therefore, marks an essential step in protecting them."

Court to rule on father's right-to-know

Judges have ordered an urgent hearing to decide whether a mother who abandoned her baby son can prevent the child's father being told about him. The woman had lived with the baby's father, but had hidden the pregnancy and birth from him and he remains unaware of the child's existence. The mother subsequently "delivered the baby to a local hospital and made it plain that she did not seek to care for the child." A guardian acting for the child wishes the man to be informed, but the mother has sought to prevent this. Sitting in the Civil Appeal Court, Lord Justice Thorpe has ordered an urgent hearing, which the mother is compelled to attend, to take place in Newcastle to decide the issue. A date has yet to be confirmed for the hearing, which could set an important precedent regarding a man's right to be told about children he has fathered and a child's right to know his father.

Hymangate - the real Neverending Story

The latest twist in the Bruce Hyman affair took place last week when on November 10th Hyman was dismissed from the Bar. Most McKenzie readers will remember that Hyman is the radio producer-turned-lawyer who became the first British barrister to be imprisoned for perverting the course of justice.

His offence was astounding. He was representing a mother in a bitter contact case, and tried to frame his client's ex-husband for a serious criminal offence and have him sent to jail. He sent the husband (Simon Eades, an FNF member) an email purporting to be a piece of helpful case law provided by FNF. His plan nearly worked. When father produced the case in court Hyman dramatically denounced it as a forgery, and the father as the forger.

The astounded Mr Eades feared that he would be jailed.

And prosecuted he would have been if he had not managed to track down the source of the email to an electrical shop in Tottenham Court Road. By a stroke of great fortune (even divorced dads get lucky sometimes) the shop owner remembered the visit from the e-mail's sender, and was able to provide CCTV footage which identified him as Bruce Hyman. Hyman was convicted of perverting the course of justice, and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment in September 2007. In one of the numerous odd aspects of this appalling case, he appears to have served less than three months of this sentence, a term that justice minister Jack Straw has refused to explain.

You might reasonably expect that Hyman's dismissal from the Bar would be a mere formality, but it still took more than two years after his arrest for the Bar Council to hear the

case and a grindingly slow three-hour hearing, in front of five Tribunal members, to finally end his career as a barrister

Hymangate is a potent symbol of legal degeneracy but it seems that the story may not end there. Another worrying aspect of the case was that the head of the Family Division, Sir Mark Potter, provided a character reference for Hyman. This was a highly questionable move, and it now seems there may be more questions to be answered about the reference. **Calum Chace**

Update – Since the submission of this article it has been reported that the Office of Judicial Complaints has launched a fresh investigation regarding the reference provided by Sir Mark Potter at Hyman's trial. Watch this space, and the national press, for yet more on this story.

Family Law Survey Update

Steve Gouldstone tells us about the latest findings from the Families Need Fathers/Equal Parenting Alliance Family Law Survey

One of the most sobering findings coming out of the family law survey being run jointly by FNF / EPA is the effect on the health and well-being of adults left without their children.

The amount of time lost from work due to sick-leave caused by family law disputes is not widely recognised. Over two-thirds (69%) of our survey respondents said that the process had made them ill enough to have to take time off work. The sick leave taken varied widely: less than a month in 37% of cases, up to six months in 18% of cases, up to 3 years in 24% of cases, and more than 3 years or permanent loss of work in 22% of cases. Clearly our failing system of family law is causing severe damage to adults as

well as children, and also to the economy. The most commonly reported health problems caused by the family law process were stress, anxiety, depression and problems sleeping, with around 80% of respondents reporting one or more of these.

It gets worse. Over a third (36%) of survey respondents reported having suicidal thoughts, and a horrifying 7% said they actually attempted suicide. Levels of attempted suicide for the population at large are uncertain, but are estimated at 0.1%. This suggests that a parent denied access to their children may be about seventy times as likely to attempt suicide as the general population.

The responses support anecdotal reports that two men commit suicide every week due to the loss of their children.

We know that around three times as many men as women commit suicide every year (3,223 men and 1,113 women committed suicide in England & Wales in 2005). It may well be that a substantial proportion of these male suicides are attributable to family law issues.

Denying a parent contact with their children without good reason is a form of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is a social evil in all its forms. It is time for this form of it to be taken seriously.

Visit www.FamilyLawSurvey.co.uk to find out more and take part in the survey

It's not for hippies - it's for you!

Simon Ramet tells us more about his Sug Mon Kooky project

It's your weekend, finally. You're bruised, beaten and about to hop on the emotional rollercoaster that is contact, anxious about how your kids are going to be and how they're going to feel about you. They may reveal upsetting things and all your energy will go into doing as much as possible in a desperate attempt to compete for their love. It's a recipe for a burn-out. Worst of all, your kids are going through the same stress.

The fact is, your kids love you unconditionally and you all need to take some time out to rest, cuddle up and simply be with each other. Like you, I'd never thought much of relaxation CDs, so when I was approached to produce one, I knew I had to come at it from a different point of view. It had to be something we could enjoy with our kids. It had to be fun. It had to be relevant. It had to be ... well, good enough to make my own son want to cuddle up and spend some time simply being with me. And so was born

Play Pause Unwind: a combination of music, sound effects, and talking.

When going through family breakdown, we often forget that our kids need to learn to cope with life as much as we do. Confidence, courage, expressing our feelings, relaxation – these are all survival skills that are learnt and therefore need to be taught.



'The Castle', one of the pieces produced by Simon's son.

Play Pause Unwind's visualisations are more than just a way to chill out together, they are an aid to communication and creativity for your kids. You can use them to inspire pictures, models or to make up stories for each other. They're fun activities you can do with your kids that cost nothing but mean everything and don't add a thing to your legal fees. Send your pictures and stories to me and I'll add them to the Play Pause Unwind gallery so your kids can enjoy seeing them on the internet whenever they like.

I know what you're going through – a CD is not going to change the system but it can help you step out of the loop for a moment and connect with your kids.

Visit www.sugmonkooky.com to download four tracks completely free. Support FNF by buying online or send a cheque for £10.99 made payable to Sug Mon Kooky to 49 Main Road, Hockley, Essex SS5 4QY.



Family Law Review - The FNF Response

In November, The Times reported on exciting proposals from the Centre for Social Justice, under the front-page headline 'Tories to make it harder to divorce'. **Becky Sibert** presents the FNF response.

The last report from Social Justice Policy Group, Breakthrough Britain, included the recommendation that there be a review of Family Law. The Family Law Review, the interim findings of the Centre for Social Justice, is an important report that gets to the heart of the key problems and asks the right questions. It underlines a real commitment to making the appropriate reform to a system that greatly needs it. The review effectively grasps the role of the law as it concerns family life.

Families Need Fathers are encouraged to read the suggestions with regard to how more could and should be done to support relationships. It is suggested that relationship education is an option and we feel this is an important step for early intervention. We would urge the members of the review to consider that this should be available not just before couples marry, but in the classroom too. Furthermore, we

strongly support the attention given in Section Four of the report (Family Law and Post-Separation Agreements) to non-legal services which could be made available for couples after separation, ensuring that courts are truly a last resort. FNF have long recognised Australia as a leader in policy surrounding divorce and separation and are gratified that the report reflects this. We believe that a cultural change in attitudes to family breakdown is needed here too.

Families Need Fathers continually hears the same message from fathers and mothers that contact arrangements are not being kept. We support the recommendation that the Judicial Studies Board should explicitly encourage judges to take a more 'hands-on' approach to stop this. Especially encouraging is the helpful discussion around shared parenting and we agree that the "concept of quality of contact rather than simple quantity does not adequately address the claim made by some groups that

quality is impossible to achieve without sufficient quantity".

Families Need Fathers have many members who are grandparents and we see on a regular basis the painful and damaging effects of disrupted contact between grandchildren and grandparents. FNF and The Grandparents' Association have recently carried out some research that found that the problem is far more widespread than first thought, with just fewer than 50% of grandparents having no direct contact with their grandchildren at all. We are encouraged by the attention to this in the review, but remain convinced that it should not be necessary for grandparents to go through a two-stage judicial process to secure contact.

Ultimately the Centre for Social Justice and the Family Law Review play a very important part in this debate by offering valuable and beneficial suggestions in a positive context.

New Court Forms

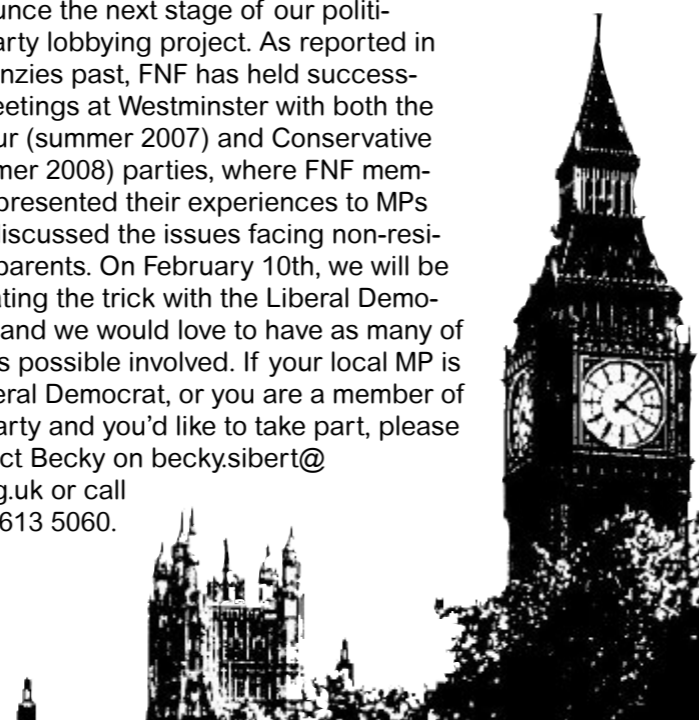
As reported on page three, the new sanctions of the Children & Adoption Act 2006 come into force on December 8th. As part of this, there is a new form, the C100, which is to be used for **ALL SECTION 8** (of the Children Act 1989) **APPLICATIONS** (Applications for Contact, Resident, Prohibited Steps or Specific Issues) from that date.

According to HMCS, the new C100 has a more straightforward layout and is designed to be easier to understand. It also gathers more information about the children and the case, including whether mediation has taken place and details which will make police checks easier.

So, from December 8th, if you are applying for a Contact, Residence, Prohibited Steps or Specific Issues Order, you will need a C100 Form. These can be obtained from your local court or downloaded from: www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk

Liberal Democrat Forum

Families Need Fathers is delighted to announce the next stage of our political party lobbying project. As reported in McKenzies past, FNF has held successful meetings at Westminster with both the Labour (summer 2007) and Conservative (summer 2008) parties, where FNF members presented their experiences to MPs and discussed the issues facing non-resident parents. On February 10th, we will be repeating the trick with the Liberal Democrats and we would love to have as many of you as possible involved. If your local MP is a Liberal Democrat, or you are a member of the party and you'd like to take part, please contact Becky on becky.sibert@fnf.org.uk or call 0207 613 5060.



The Family Law Atlas

In the next in our series looking at Shared Parenting around the world **Becky Sibert** tells us about a place down under...

Australia is often seen as a leading light in supporting families and is commended on its holistic approach to both law and policy. We regularly refer to the Australian example as an example of best practice and hope that one day we can see similarities with our own system. It would be impossible to go into detail about all the elements of how Australia looks after separated families, but here we highlight the major points.

The Australian Family Law Act 1975 has been a controversial piece of legislation and has been subject to many changes and amendments, which have naturally reflected the governing party of the time. John Howard of the Liberal Party (similar to our Conservative Party), Prime Minister from 1996 to 2007, believed that the family was one of the most important civil institutions and in 2006 he instigated several important amendments to the Act:

- **a progression** towards compulsory mediation (before Court proceedings can be filed, in an effort to ensure matters do not reach litigation),
- **greater examination** of issues involving family violence, child abuse or neglect,
- **more importance** being placed on a child's family and social connections, and
- **a presumption** that parents have equal parental responsibility.

Probably the element that we are most excited about is the Presumption of Shared Parental Responsibility. Section 61DA of the Act states that:

(1) When making a parenting order in relation to a child, the court must apply a presumption that it is in the best interests of the child for the child's parents to have equal shared parental responsibility for the child.

Note that the presumption provided for in this subsection is a presump-

tion that relates solely to the allocation of parental responsibility for a child - it does not provide for a presumption about the amount of time the child spends with each of the parents.

And how do those Australians answer those that believe this is not in the best interest of the child? Well, Section Two of the act makes it clear that the presumption does not apply if there are reasonable grounds to believe that a parent, or someone who lives with a parent, is abusive towards any children in the collective family, or engages in family violence. Furthermore, the court has a catch-all discretion to rebut the presumption if it believes it would not be in the child's best interest, or if it would not be appropriate when making an interim order.

Another important difference between our courts is the fact that in Oz the courts are open to both the public and the media. A child's privacy is protected through restrictions on identifying children and the discretion to close courts during sensitive cases. One of the reasons commonly cited against open family court systems, is that it promotes a 'nosey neighbour' culture. However, most reports from the Australian system say this just doesn't happen and child welfare is always promoted.

This all looks very impressive, but...

How do the Australians deal with broken court orders, one of our biggest problems? Well, the Australian Court retains its ability to hand down punitive sanctions where parties do not comply with Court orders, including prison, fines and work orders. In most cases, however, the most effective method of penalising a person is to award legal costs against them. In fact, the 2006 Amendments encourage this to be used as a sanction where people have made improper or false allegations about someone else to the Court.



Those clever Australians have also transformed the language of separation, doing away with the frightful terms of 'custody' and 'access'. Instead, children's parents are referred to as the parent who the child 'lives with' and who the child should 'spend time with'.

Furthermore, they've even found time to revolutionise their Child Support System. Instead of promoting conflict, their system is expected to reduce it, and to encourage shared parenting arrangements rather than punish them. They even share Family Tax Benefit amongst carers!

So, what about services?

In Australia, help for those who find themselves separating comes in the form of local Family Relationship Centres. These ensure a joined-up approach to family breakdown, and are designed to deal with many issues under one roof. Individuals have an initial one-to-one interview with a family advisor, which acts as a gateway to the service system. An amount of free mediation is offered and it seems that equal numbers of men and women are making the first calls. There is a focus on casework and follow-ups are ensured and maintained. The essential message is that although a relationship may end, parenthood continues and all the responsibilities that go with it do too.

It's still early days for the new Australian system, but so far the reports are positive. We don't think there are any great tricks or secrets - just a desire to put children first and to recognise that both parents matter.

Now, doesn't that all sound like a bonzer idea? (*and not a kangaroo court joke in sight* - Ed.)

Kids In The Middle



Starting out from humble beginnings, the Kids In The Middle joint campaign has grown to dizzying heights of success, and only looks like growing further. The campaign, run by Families Need Fathers, Fatherhood Institute, One Parent Families and Relate, and headed by The Sun's Agony Aunt Deidre Sanders, is intended to highlight the difficulties faced by both parents and children during separation and divorce, and to call for increased support services for those enduring such circumstances.

Following our successful survey of 1500+ respondents, our report on

your experiences of services for those going through family separation was presented to Ed Balls, Minister for Children, Schools and Families, at a Westminster meeting with 15 of the UK's leading agony aunts (and one uncle) pressuring Mr Balls to speak up and take action. Following further meetings with senior ministry officials, a Relationship Summit has been organised for December 18th where the Kids In The Middle coalition, together with 20 agony aunts and uncles, will meet with Ed Balls and Beverly Hughes to discuss what steps the DCSF will be taking to better support separating families. On our agenda will be better relationship education for children and a set of pilot projects providing substantial support services for separating families.

Finerday - Be involved!

Finerday is a free web service designed to help families keep in touch across the generations and across the world. Directed by FNF member Howard Bashford, it's inspired by his own experiences of being an overseas parent when his young son was moved to Spain. It's a very similar concept to Facebook, but safe and secure for children and the vulnerable, and simple and straightforward for those who are less technically savvy. As well as the basic functions of chatting, sending e-mails and sharing photos, it also allows you to introduce your friends and family to each other - great if you are far apart or in difficult circumstances (don't worry - you can also prevent people from being introduced if tensions are high!).

As well as sponsoring our Grandparents' Rights Campaign in February (more on that in McKenzie 83), Finerday are also keen to get feedback from FNF members and their families for whom Finerday, whilst not being a replacement for contact, could be a new and interesting tool for continuing relationships.

Therefore, Finerday are seeking some test subjects to take part in a pilot project in the New Year. As mentioned before, the service is free and there is also a small number of laptop computers available to help those who otherwise would not be able to access the service. If you are interested in finding out more about the Finerday pilot, please e-mail nick.barnard@fnf.org.uk or call 0207 613 5060.

EHRC Shared Parenting Project

“ Thanks to great help from members I am making progress with the project on shared parenting I'm doing for FNF, covered in the last issue. I am drafting guidelines for use in various contexts: by Cafcass front line case officers, litigants in person (with an about-to-be-launched FNF pack for LIPs, which will be a great source), in schools and Sure Start centres. If anyone is interested in being interviewed or seeing drafts please contact me at craig.pickering@fnf.org.uk. **Craig Pickering** ”



Ed Balls and the Agony Aunts

FNF Trustees - Could you help?

Families Need Fathers is extremely pleased to welcome Kimberly Pender as the latest addition to the board of trustees. Kimberly is a family law solicitor based in Cambridge and has been providing free advice to the Cambridge/Newmarket branch for 10 years and was most recently 'Named & Acclaimed' by Anthony Esler in McKenzie 80.

Kimberly and Neil Grice (interviewed on page 11) are extremely welcome additions to FNF's board of trustees, although there still remains one vacant spot on the board.

We're particularly looking for people with **financial, business and accounting** experience to add to the wide range of skills already present. The board of trustees meets four times a year in London so if it's something you think you might be able to devote a portion of your time and energy to, please request an enquiry pack from Ian Julian on ian.julian@fnf.org.uk or call 0207 613 5060.

Benefiting everyone

John Baker on why when care is shared, state benefits should be too.

I am currently assisting a mother of several children. She loves them to bits, but they do not live with her. She would like at least the younger ones to. She sees them regularly for substantial periods. Since they often don't come together this takes up quite a lot of her time. This is one of the reasons she lives on benefits. They love her and get a lot out of being with her. I do not know how much state money goes to contribute to their upkeep, but making modest estimates of the amounts of child benefit, child tax credits, subsidised daycare and free school meals means that it is unlikely to be less than £400 per week for all the children. It could be significantly higher.

Since the mother is not the principal carer of any of them, she gets none of this. Her home is paid for by housing benefit, and she gets a few other small concessions, but her income otherwise is £60 per week. Out of this she has to provide for everything else - including anything spent on her children.

The legal case is pending. It is open to question whether her financial position enables her to have a fair chance to prove what sort of a parent she is, but she is actually quite privileged in the meantime. Until the final hearing the authorities pick up the cost of transport for contact and she has a two bedroom

flat. If she loses the case, she will have to pay for the fares and will lose her flat. The Child Support Agency will make a deduction from her benefit in respect of her 'responsibility for the children'. Money which, incidentally, is taken by the state and not handed over to the children's principal carers.

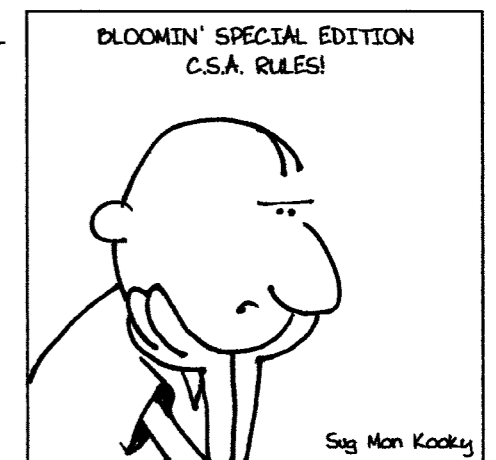
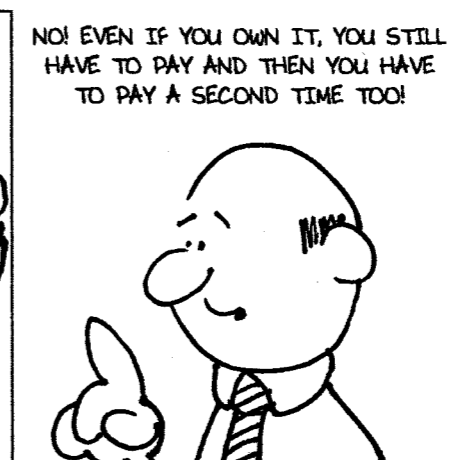
“ **Sharing would change the unacceptable social signal that the state regards one of the children's parents as important, and the other not.** ”

One can imagine what sort of a relationship the children will be able to have with her if she does not become the principal parent. But if she wins, the children may not be better off as far as their overall family relationships are concerned. What would be inflicted on her will just be inflicted on them instead. There are also the people the children are living with at the moment, and presumably they have bonds there too, and would benefit from those relationships being allowed to continue. Their improved relationship with their mother may be directly at the expense of their relationship with other members of the family.

What sort of child-friendly system is this?

The time children spend with their 'other parent' often correlates directly with that parent's income. Among the 'socially excluded' the inability of a contact parent to pay for bus fares or bags of crisps can make contact very difficult. Middle income people may struggle to have a home with a spare bedroom for regular travel if the children are moved some way away.

FNF has long demanded that where parenting of the children is shared, so too should be the money that the government gives to help parents with the upkeep of children. This is primarily for practical child welfare reasons, to avoid the situations I have just described. It is a social justice and anti-poverty move, as the present situation impacts worse on the children of the poor. It is a gender equality move, for the current position makes it financially difficult for children to have full and free relationships with male parents (96% of contact parents are fathers). The current position may even be illegal. The 'Hockenjos judgement' was that the failure to share child additions to income-related Jobseeker's Allowance was discriminatory. Lastly, sharing would change the unacceptable social signal that the state regards one of the children's parents as important, and the other not.



Branches

Branch Meeting News

Lots of exciting news on the branch meetings front. As mentioned in the last McKenzie, the **Port Talbot** meeting is now established and a welcome addition to our services in Wales. Port Talbot meetings are held at 7.30pm on the last Tuesday of each month at Taibach Rugby Club, Commercial Road, Taibach, Port Talbot SA13 1LN - more info from Pat Lyons on 07736 888 888.

We're also jolly pleased that another meeting has been added to the London stable. FNF **South London**

now meets at 8pm on the second Monday of each month at The Westbridge Pub, 74-76 Battersea Bridge Road, London SW11 3AG - contact Darren Patterson on 020 7223 1147.

The newest addition to the FNF branch meeting is looking to be **Dorset**, filling an important gap in our coverage. A trial meeting was held in early December and if you would like to be involved with future meetings please contact Mark Watson on 01305 264459 / 07989306322.

Regarding Baby P

FNF has not yet issued a statement about Baby P and this has not been a lightly taken decision. More is coming out about the father but we have been very cautious, not knowing any details of him, his situation or his involvement.

Despite tabloid headlines it is very unclear what happened in some crucial aspects of the tragedy. The father is retaining his anonymity and in the only statement he has issued he said: " (I) would like to thank the police for their efforts in obtaining the evidence to bring a conclusion to this case. I would also like to thank the social workers who have been involved since P's death. They have acted with professionalism and courtesy. "

This seemed to imply that he did not have issues with the way he was treated by either of them. The facts are coming out slowly but I decided that the best course was not to launch in, as so many politicians and pundits have done, but build on FNF's growing reputation for being an authority on family issues and wait for a time when we might actually get heard and when we would be clearer about what our line should be.

There are aspects of this tragic death that go to the heart of our philosophy:

- Was the father being denied access?
- Did the Social Service staff involve the father and any extended family?
- Is there a general lack of understanding in Family Services of the value of fathers and a child's extended family?
- Are there adequate triggers for investigating new partners when fears are expressed concerning child neglect or abuse or domestic violence?

FNF receives a steady stream of enquiries from fathers worried about their children being in a hostile home environment and will act on their behalf with local social services. Our experience is limited but we would be interested to hear from FNF members with experiences that illustrate any of the above issues and who would be willing to share them with us and if possible the press. In the meantime we will review our position in the light of clear facts as they become established. If there is a public enquiry we must be represented.

Please send your thoughts and especially personal experiences to the office.

Thanks,
Jon Davies. FNF CEO



Finally, exciting things have been going on with the FNF **Reading - Thames Valley** branch, who have secured the use of a shop in Tilehurst (264 Kentwood Hill, Tilehurst, Reading RG31 6DR). As well as hosting meetings at 8.30pm on the second and fourth Monday of the month (replacing meetings at the Prospect Park Harvester) the shop is being run by branch members as an FNF information and support centre and, in parallel, as a separate Community Interest Company. McKenzie will be reporting on their endeavours in January, but in the meantime they are keen to receive donations (particularly CDs, DVDs, computer games and children's games) suitable for sale in the shop. To find out more contact Andy on tvfnf264@ntlworld.com, call 0118 901 9132 or visit www.tvfnf.org.uk

Get all the info on Branch Meetings (including Christmas alterations) at

www.fnf.org.uk/help-and-support/local-branch-meetings

or call 0207 6135060

Waitrose Charity Campaign

Everyone's favourite wide-aisled grocer Waitrose is currently giving something back by donating £1000 per month to each store's local charities. Whenever you visit the tills there, you'll be given a green token, which you then use to nominate a charity from that month's choice of three. The £1000 is then split between the worthy causes based on votes cast.

Best of all - you can get Families Need Fathers involved. Next time you're in Waitrose make sure you fill in the forms in-store to get us on the short-list for some valuable pounds - and publicity!

Branch of the Month

In October, McKenzie got on a train. When we got off, we were in Chelmsford, it was snowing and **Neil Grice** was there to meet us.

Can you give us a little history about how the Chelmsford branch came to be?

The Chelmsford branch has been running since April 2007 and in the main the history is that, being a Chelmsford resident for the last eight years, it is where my children are, it is where I have been caught more times than I care to remember by the injustice of the legal system and so I felt that there were a lot of people in that part of the world who perhaps needed some help.

Unfortunately, due to the fact that I have a big mouth and gobbled off about forming the Chelmsford branch for about a year, too many people in FNF said "why don't you go and do it," hence the reason I ended up becoming Chair and setting it up. Seriously though, I did feel as if there was a need for a branch out in Essex and I have, I believe, a level of commitment and expertise that would allow me to run such a branch having been quite involved with the running in the last two to three years of the Central London branch. It is good to be able to help people who, in the main, are in the same court as you have been. You build up a picture of the various Judges. I was also somewhat inspired by the Chair of FNF Charles Kenyon informing me that everybody had a duty to assist in the problem of parents, and fathers particularly, seeing their children and I was left with nowhere to go but to set the branch up.

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

Numbers vary, as they tend to do at regional branches, however we normally get a hardcore of about six and I believe 15 is the biggest number we have had. We do, of course, get quite a few chaps phoning us in between meetings so I would like to think that on any monthly basis we help somewhere between 15 and 25 people. I am always amazed by how far people are prepared to come to seek advice in seeing their children and we not infrequently get people coming to us from Stansted and South Cambridgeshire, Colchester and parts of Suffolk as well as the southern parts of Essex.

What is the best thing you think your branch has achieved?

Any time somebody comes to see us and says that they have seen some more of, or even just managed to see, their children is I believe the greatest achievement we can wish for. I also get a personal satisfaction in providing a level of hope to a number of chaps who turn up quite clearly desperate and punch-drunk by the system which they have found themselves fighting. Fundamentally when somebody phones up or turns up and says "thank you, I got some time with my children this month," that is a great feeling.

What do you think the strengths of FNF as an organisation are?

I am always amazed by how committed FNF is to helping as many people as possible at a grass-roots, coal-face level whether it is guys running branches, helpline volunteers or people who populate and help on the forums and I believe just being an ear is our greatest strength. I am also becoming increasingly impressed by the high-level meetings we are managing to attend and the quality of politicians/ministers/civil servants who are now giving us time.

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

This is always a difficult one and fundamentally I do think it is wrong to be critical of an organisation that is predominately run by volunteers. However, as we grow and manage to have a high quality of professional paid staff, I believe that we do need to set ourselves a higher standard in terms of what we want to achieve and perhaps more importantly when we need to achieve it by. We sometimes, in my own opinion, walk away from fights we should have even if they are unwinnable and are likely to make us unpopular. I understand the need for some politics. However, I do not think FNF should be afraid to pick a fight assuming it is the right fight and to highlight as much as we can the powerful interests and the horror story that too often is the family courts.

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

VENUE REVIEW: CHELMSFORD



New attendees: 2
New members by next day: 2
Distance from Station: 200 chilly yards
Remember to Bring: Coat, mittens, whale fat.

I think a Dear Deirdre page in the McKenzie Magazine would be hugely powerful. Nothing I think inspires and pushes you on more than reading of some absolute horror story of children being parted from one of their parents and the efforts that that parent has to go through just to stay in touch let alone grow the relationship with their children. I would also like, if it were feasible, to have more of an exposé, naming and shaming, of particularly bad examples of family law in practice.

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

Richard Branson - a man who is extremely well known and is renowned for getting things done. Alternatively, and being extremely mean, should Gordon Brown's or David Cameron's wife and children chose to leave them and put them through what most of us have been through I suspect the law could be changed very quickly and very much in favour of our children.

We are interviewing CMEC Chair Paraskeva in this issue. If you could spend a week at the helm of CMEC what would you do?

I would do it right! I would do it justly! And I would always always look at the ramifications of any action I took. If CMEC does nothing more than inject common sense and fairness into their work then they will be better. Also, please challenge decisions that are wrong and have CMEC employees be trained to stand up and be counted, not hide behind a system.

Thank you Neil.

NEW ERA?

CMEC has actually enjoyed a rather straightforward life so far, being conceived in 2006 when then-Work & Pensions Secretary John Hutton told the Commons that the CSA, with its backlog of 30,000 cases and £3 billion in uncollected debts, was to be wound up and replaced with a "small, more focussed" body.

Fast-forward two years, and a relatively simple passage through the birth canal of Parliament led to the arrival on July 24th 2008 of the Child Support and Other Payments Bill. Officially stirring to life on November 1st, McKenzie anticipates a fair share of crying, screaming and sicking-up before CMEC can stand on its own two feet.

THE KING IS DEAD...

On the plus side, CMEC does have at least some new leases of life. It's now a 'Non-Departmental Public Body', which means that it is one step detached from the Depart-

ment of Work & Pensions and has a greater degree of independence, in theory, from those who might be setting targets for monies collected. There are also a number of other practical changes:

- The 'benefit disregard' (the amount of maintenance someone can keep before it is deducted from their state benefits) has been doubled to £20, and there will be a total disregard from some point in 2010 – meaning that if your child's other parent receives benefits, they will still receive all of the maintenance you pay, rather than the Treasury taking the bulk of it.
- Those receiving benefits will no longer be compelled to receive maintenance through the CSA/ CMEC if they prefer to make a private arrangement with the other parent.
- CMEC will also provide Options, an information service for parents paying and receiving maintenance to guide them through

the various arrangements and help them choose the one which suits best. Primarily a telephone and online service, Options can also refer clients to a face-to-face advice service if deemed necessary.

"It's going to respect parents equally"

Janet Paraskeva on why CMEC will be an improvement on the CSA

"If we have to use those measures very many times we will have failed. We need tough enforcement powers but if we are doing our job well, then they should be needed only for a diminishing number of non-resi-

dent parents. We can take away driving licences at the moment, but now we're seeking to solve issues administratively and save unnecessary court time and money. At the end of the day, parents have a responsibility to finance their children and it is our duty to make sure that happens. Our bigger area of work and focus has to be on the change of culture; to encourage people to think positively about their responsibilities and to want to make a private arrangement that works for both parties."

In a major sticking point for FNF members, there has also been no change to the rules regarding shared care – meaning that you could look after your children one night in two and still be expected to pay. Finally, there seems to be no definite plan for rectifying the frustrating icing on a miserable cake for many CSA clients. We are told that a new IT system will be in place by 2011, but how things will run until then and how the new system will ensure that it serves children and parents efficiently, is yet to be revealed.

So, what can families really expect from CMEC? Is it a new dawn for child maintenance or is it same old, same old?

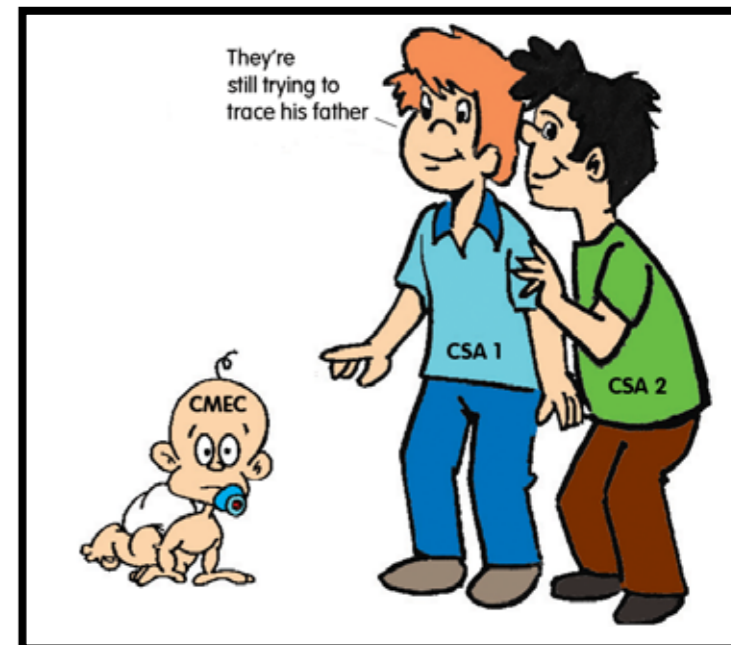
The answer, as you may have guessed, is we'll have to wait and see. There are undoubtedly some fresh faces, fresh ideas and fresh policies driving CMEC. But we are also in no doubt that mistakes, some very simple, have been left uncorrected. It will be well into the next decade before the true verdict can be passed on CMEC. McKenzie will be sure to be covering every step of the way, and looks forward to hearing your stories, good or bad. In the meantime, turn over to pages 14 and 15 for our extensive interview with the Chair of CMEC Janet Paraskeva.



... LONG LIVE THE KING.

However, shadows of the CSA linger. Although there is a new Chair and new board, many of the staff, including Commissioner Stephen Geraghty, remain, hopefully putting the experience of the last fifteen years to good use. Deduction of Earnings Orders (where monies are taken directly from pay packets) are to become the standard method of collection and CMEC's ability to impose sanctions against non-paying parents (including confiscating driving licences and passports, and imposing curfews) has been extended, as has its ability to impose Liability Orders, which previously had to be applied for through a court.

On these new enforcement powers, Janet Paraskeva told McKenzie



Postcard sent from FNF to CMEC offices in November

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

Not all CSA cases will be immediately transferred onto CMEC – in fact the majority will stay on the current schemes for a short while yet. Some will have a choice whether to stay on the current scheme, transfer to CMEC or make a private arrangement. If you're not sure about your current status, and what your options for the future are, then contact CMEC's Options service:

Telephone 0800 988 0988 (freephone, although some service providers may charge for calls)

Online: <http://www.cmoptions.org>

OR NEW ERROR?

CHILD MAINTENANCE TIMELINE

1993 CSA founded by Conservatives. Designed to replace court-based maintenance procedures, cut social benefit bills and ensure absent fathers fulfil their responsibilities.

1996 Upaid maintenance tops £1bn

2005 Government report suggests that the "vast majority" of administrative staff are unhappy and want to leave.

June 2007 Government publishes bill proposing replacement maintenance service.

2014 (?) All elements of the CSA have been incorporated into CMEC.

McKenzie meets Janet Paraskeva



How is CMEC going to be different from the CSA?

CMEC will be different for all non-resident parents in two main ways. The first is that we're not going to intervene in people's lives unless they want us to, and that choice becomes equalised across all parents at the end of October. I think that's a really important message - no state intervention in relation to your maintenance arrangements unless you want it. The other is that we're providing the information and support services through Options (see p12) so that parents with care and non-resident parents should get equal service from that. It isn't the case that if you're the parent with care you'll get a different kind or level of support or service. You'll get the same service whichever you are. Our business is to help try to increase maintenance and to give people the information and support that they need in order to choose whether they want to make their own private arrangements or whether they would like to come back, to CSA in the immediate instance, or to the Commission when it's up and running, to do that for them.

What's being done to address the infrastructural problems that plagued the CSA - particularly with regard to IT?

I think we all know the history of the IT problems in the CSA and they don't really need repeating. Again, two things to say - one is that under Stephen Geraghty's leadership (CEO) there have been improvements even to the old systems and the last release on September 22nd will make a huge difference to the administrative ease under which present ar-

Janet Paraskeva began her career as a teacher but has since taken roles in many different spheres of public life, including the Lottery, the Serious Crime Agency and the Law Society and in November 2007 was announced as CMEC's first Chair Designate.

rangements are made. The important thing is that we are starting afresh and we are presently tendering for an IT contractor, not to start from scratch, but to build software which will integrate a whole range of off-the-shelf packages. We're going to use the packages that are tried and tested by banks and building societies, and build the software linking them all together. We're tendering that at present and we're aiming to have the packages integrated by 2011. So, it'll be a much more streamlined, straightforward system that we'll use. We'll then give people the choice as to whether and when they come across to the new system. So it'll be 2014 before we can finally bury the letters CSA and that's quite a hard public message to get over, which is why we're really welcoming talking to FNF. This is not a short-term fix of the CSA. It is a proper attempt to get it right this time.

Why are we waiting for a full benefit disregard?

I wish I knew. We lobbied very hard for the full disregard to come in. We thought that final break with the benefits system would be a very important one to make and that the government's policy of getting more money to more children is one that we'd all support and want to make happen. I think that in the end the arithmetic in the Treasury made them a little more cautious than we would have wanted but at least it will come in in 2010 and the £20 disregard of course comes in now, and the full housing disregard as well. So that's an important message. But we would have liked to have had the full disregard immediately. One of the advantages of being a Non-Departmental Public Body will be that we'll be slightly freer to lobby the government on policies in the child-support arena than the CSA was, so it's something that we'll keep absolutely on our agenda.

Recent newspaper reports suggested that the importance of financially supporting your children, and the penalties for not doing so, will become part of the national curriculum. What's the real story?

It's interesting what happens when journalists get hold of things... Our main objective is to increase child maintenance, but we actually have three core functions, one of which is about promoting financial responsibility. I was talking about education in two ways: we want people involved in education; people who meet all parents, with-care and non-resident; people in SureStart programmes, children's centres and so on, to be completely au fait with the Options service and the nature of the offering in the future - which is that we'll help you make your own arrangements, which everybody says they want and everybody says they'd prefer, and if you can't make that work, or if you'd like us to do it for you, then come to us. So we really want people in education services to help us do that. This, after all, is part of a cross-cutting government agenda issue.

With regards to the curriculum, whilst our primary purpose is to do with child maintenance, we want to engage in a much more holistic conversation with people about relationships and relationship breakdown. Now that is firmly on the agenda of the Personal-Health-Social Education curriculum and therefore I think we want it to become part of the ordinary conversation - not "we want everyone to know about the CSA" but we want people to understand that during a relationship you need to think about how you take care of your children and, therefore, when you split, you still need to think about that, including the financial responsibility.

How do we involve ourselves in the educational process with young men and with men who are fathers, given

that 96% of NRPs are men? Let's have a look at the education of both young women and young men, but particularly focussing on the bit that sometimes young men find more difficult, which is talking about relationships. So we hope that's the way it would be introduced, rather than perhaps the way it was flagged up in the newspapers.

Tell us about the Options service - particularly whether you think that will be the first thing to be cut back when budgets get tight.

It's certainly our priority, because we need to help people make a choice and they can't make that choice unless they've got proper information and support. That's exactly what Options is there for. It's much more than just a call centre, and of course it has the back-up of face-to-face help, so that if the staff in the Options service believe that someone can't deal with an issue over the phone we've got a team of face-to-face workers that they can refer people to. That went live for everyone at the end of October and it's been working pretty effectively so far. When we release the service to all current applicants, there will be a much heavier workload and we will monitor that carefully to ensure that, not only are we giving as good a service as we are now, but that we are actually able to follow up arrangements properly. What we know - from those people who are able to make a choice over whether they use the CSA now - is that 40% choose to. So we've based our targets and business on 40% of people doing so in future, and we'll be monitoring very carefully to make sure that's right and adjust accordingly. Regarding times getting tough, none of us would say 'I think this has got to go' or 'that's got to go'. I think in the end we would need a proper model for the impact of reducing or removing any part of our service. It certainly wouldn't be a case of chopping one function off. Options is one of the key planks of development that CMEC's got that the CSA didn't have - and it's the key to helping people make private arrangements, so I wouldn't have thought that would be the first thing to go.

Do you think promoting private arrangements will be a success? How can you support those who wish to make them and do you think that you

have a responsibility to make sure they're fair?

That's a very difficult question. Research tells us that ninety-something percent of people would prefer them, so we'll see if they take them up. If you want the state to butt out of people's affairs and respect the two parties to come to a proper arrangement, then that's what you have to do. But you have to make sure that both sides know that if they feel it's not fair and it's not working then they can come back to us without stigma and we will deal very quickly with putting them into the system. I think we will have to survey people as a way of trying to find out how things are working. We'll use the household survey, we'll do some snapshot research and some longitudinal studies because we'll need to set ourselves some targets, and measure against those targets. And those targets will have to be about effective child maintenance, which means effective for all three parties, including the children.

Theoretically, you're independent from the DWP - but presumably they will be setting your targets. How will that work?

We are a Non-Departmental Public Body, which gives us a great deal of independence from the DWP. It is our host department, but we have an independent board of non-executives and I've put on that board a family lawyer, someone with third sector experience, a director of children's services, someone with IT knowledge and some with financial nous. Those non-execs, together with the executives, will be the board who determine the strategic policy within the targets set by the Secretary of State. So one of the things we'll be doing with the Secretary of State is negotiating what we believe to be achievable within the resources we have, and again we'll be able to lobby and argue about policy in relation to child maintenance. From our work on child maintenance we may also be asked to contribute to wider discussions. Very clearly we have a remit to effect policy changes with regards to child maintenance.

What are the pressures on you as a chair? How will you know if you've succeeded?

The pressures will be to make sure

that when we take over the CSA we focus on the continuing improvement of the current system as well as getting the new organisation up and running with all its changes, and making sure that the staff are properly supported so that the decisions they make about the new IT system are the right ones. I'll have succeeded if we keep out of the headlines. I would love to have the new organisation seen as something that is valued by people, that they can choose to use because it works, rather than seeing it as people will remember the old system. Something that's there to serve people who can't make their own arrangements because it's all too tense.

What would you say to a father who pays his maintenance on time, every month - yet still doesn't ever see his children?

I think it's one of the most difficult issues, the contact-maintenance argument. We can't get involved with it; the legislation is absolutely clear that our business is maintenance. I mentioned earlier that we want to be involved in much more holistic provision. What all the agencies in the 'relationship breakdown circle' must do is make sure that proper signposting is available, so if a non-resident parent told us that, we should at least be able to say 'Have you contacted Relate?' or whichever third-sector organisation might be able to help. It's not our function, but surely we can signpost people to someone whose responsibility it is.

Why should parents who feel hard done by by the CSA have more faith in CMEC?

Because it's going to be new and different. Because it's going to respect parents equally. Because it's going to try and promote responsibility between parents. Because the government's changed the policy. We're no longer going to be chasing for money that's going back to the Exchequer, we're going to be chasing for money that's going back to their children. And because the organisation will give them a choice. I think the removal of state intervention unless you want it is a really important message.

Thank you Janet

In honour of the new FNF Online Forum, we've got an extended self-help section this month and a special introduction from forum moderator Mike Robinson. The messages reproduced below (which may have been edited for content and privacy) are a mixture of the new and old FNF Fora, which generate several hundred messages per week. If you're an FNF member, you can get involved too - as well as self-help there's also a wide range of general chat and news discussion too. Find out everything you need to know (including getting started FAQ) at:

www.fnf.org.uk/help-and-support/fnf-online-forum



Drop-off dilemma

Three times my 4-year-old son has visited for a sleepover but appears unsettled and cries. He allegedly has Special Needs (wife's diagnosis, though he does attend Special Nursery). As my mother-in-law was bringing him and he wouldn't let go, I didn't want to drag him into the house. So I said he may as well go back with her. Usually I pick him up and he stays here with his older brother. I have a very good relationship with my other children and as the 4-year-old hardly speaks I can't blame Parental Alienation. Any advice would be welcome.

Robert

My 4-year-old daughter also cries when I take her away and I'm still in the former marital home! I often take my children to my mother's to accustom them to being away from Mummy. You must not worry about making a scene but also don't punish your child for crying. I find it helps to show understanding that he'd like to be with Mummy but say that 'Daddy is here and now you're going to have some fun'. In my experience it's natural for a 4-year-old to get upset when moving from one parent to the other. My limited experience suggests that over time your son will accept the arrangement. Now my daughter can't wait to go to my mother's with me, so don't give in.

I give my daughter as much attention and fun as I can when she's with me. This not only takes her mind off Mummy but means I'm associated with good times. The bottom line is never turn down your children, remember you're the adult and it is in their best interest to have you. It means you have to work harder for your son when you have him but it will be worth it. You're seeking long-term happiness for your children, which may mean some minor short-term unhappiness.

Andy

I had a similar experience when one of my boys was 4. I was very hurt by it I must admit. I wasn't sure if it was down to parental alienation or just my son's obsession with TV! Fortunately the younger one was dying to get out of the house, and when I said "shall we go swimming", the elder became more interested. You have to try and make that contact, and form a pattern as soon as possible. Allowing him to not stay with you sends a lot of bad signals; you could be making a rod for your back.

Once he is alone with you and you can show him you want to make him feel better, the rest should evaporate. Your kindness in letting him go back to mum is going to be counter-productive. If it becomes a habit, you'll kick yourself. Prepare yourself for the next time; it might help to have some chocolate or similar to hand!

Noah

Statement response

I've just received my ex's lie-ridden statement, bringing up many accusations that were dealt with by the courts 2 years ago with my first application and final hearing. There are also new false accusations and lies that were not mentioned then, which span the time before those hearings through to the present day. These were unexpected and unknown so I did not write anything about them in my recently filed statement.

My question is, now I have these accusations, how can I go about refuting them? Can I send in to the court a second "mini" statement or do I have to wait till the final hearing?

Ali

Wait till the hearing. It is up to the ex to prove these allegations. As she has not brought them up before I think they will be ignored.

Daniel

Before you spend time disproving what's been said, speak to someone experienced to see how relevant the points will be in the court's eyes. Most accusations are irrelevant and it would be a shame to waste time on these.

Kurt

Changing residence

I have two step children: a girl (10) and boy (8) who live with their mother. The girl has already succumbed to parental alienation and we haven't seen her for 3 1/2 years. Her mother seems to favour her over her brother. We see the boy alternate weekends and this involves driving 400 miles twice as mother refuses to help with contact although she doesn't even work on the days we collect and return him. Mother does not allow any indirect contact, although ordered.

The boy is saying publicly that he would like to come and live with us but appears too scared of his mother to tell her or his sister. We have had the final order and therefore there is no open court action. Residence has not been assigned (no order). I'm wondering if anyone's come across a similar situation or if you have any suggestions.

Sheryl

It could be an uphill struggle, based on the wishes of an 8-year-old, to have a judge remove him from his mother and sister, to live with you such a distance away. There is an argument that, because his sister is not seeing her dad, the boy would be better off with his father because he would promote the involvement of both parents. But this is probably not relevant whilst contact remains in place, and it could be difficult to convince a judge of that.

As long as mum is facilitating contact between her son and his dad, the

Everything in Moderation

Forum moderator **Mike Robinson** tells us what goes on behind his keyboard.

For those who are not of a technological persuasion, a forum is an internet-based service where people can post messages for other forum members to read and comment on. If you're new to internet forums, they're essentially a computerised message board (without the pins).

While I'm explaining jargon, if you use forums, you may have come across the term 'moderator'. While the name sounds a little like a monster from Dr Who, FNF moderators are actually volunteers appointed by the charity's trustees to help ensure that what is posted on the FNF forums does not cause offence to other members or risk bringing the charity into disrepute.

To help everyone be aware what should or shouldn't be posted on the forums, a set of guidelines contained within a document called the Forum Charter is available on the FNF website. All forum members are asked to respect these guidelines when using the forums.

Moderators investigate when com-

plaints are made about the content of messages (sometimes called posts), and depending on the nature of the complaint, contact the people concerned. If posts are becoming a little heated, we may ask for the topic (sometimes called a 'thread') to come to an end.

Why have rules? Simply to ensure that when members access the forums, their experiences are positive and that they find a supportive environment. We understand that everyone occasionally needs to let off steam, but we also have to ensure that a heated discussion doesn't discourage other members from posting.

What type of message might break the charter? Obvious examples include messages that contain racist language, comments that are homophobic or cause offence on religious grounds. Thankfully I haven't seen one yet. Posts should not include insults directed at another member or an officer of the charity. We also ask that posts do not include swearing, do not advocate a course of action which is illegal, and that mem-



bers treat what they read on the forums in confidence.

Despite discussions often being on emotive subjects, it is very rare for moderators to need to become involved. FNF rarely receives complaints as our members' contributions are something we should rightly be proud of. Thousands of requests for information, support and advice are fulfilled each year and the quality of advice has received praise from the former president of the Family Division of the High Court.

The FNF moderators are here to help, and you can contact us by emailing moderators@fnf.org.uk

Courts are not likely to change anything substantial. You need to be aware that unless there are good reasons for an 8-year-old to be unhappy at home, his public statements of wanting to live with you might possibly be seen by some as adverse influence on him (just as it appears the daughter has had adverse influence from her mother).

Martin

You could:

- 1 Make a new application
- 2 Talk to his teachers about their pastoral role and what he says to them. Ask them to write back copying both parents.
- 3 Find an independent local professional to talk to him and report back
- 4 Address the Parental Alienation that is affecting the daughter
- 5 Seek orders for transfer of residence of both children and assistance to help them through the changes
- 6 Ask for the matter to be transferred to the high court owing to the complexity of the issues
- 7 Ask for the matter to involve a

Guardian ad Litem (Cafcass & legal representation for the children) possibly separately for each child due to their different positions

Do you (your partner) use lawyers or act as LIP? This may be relevant in your approach to the courts and may pre-determine what you do before making the application. Have you accessed your children's medical records and examined these? Whatever the daughter's position, it is not corroborated by the boy's attitude - something is clearly wrong!

Morgan

Travelling for contact

The ex of a friend of mine has moved away and taken his two children with her. She has only moved about thirty miles away but it is a very awkward journey and takes him a good couple of hours. This means that he is no longer able to have mid-week contact as his contact order says, though he

still collects them each Friday for alternate weekend contact. He also has them for part of the school holidays. Should he go back to court and ask for a new order with definitions of the new contact arrangements?

Katherine

He could go back to court and ask for extra weekend contact to make up for the loss of midweek, or ask for extra holiday contact and also indirect contact.

Ben

I had a SRO but the Judge allowed my ex to move 45 miles away, thereby stopping mid-week contact. However he agreed a Sunday night instead and ordered that because it was her decision to move and that I had agreed to take the boys to school on a Monday that she could bear the cost of bringing my boys to me (she was not happy!)

Wayne

NOTICE BOARD

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

In a move totally unrelated to the credit crunch (we promise!) the time has come to bring the fee for membership of FNF in line with the cost of providing our services across the country. From January 1st 2009, membership fees will be £36 per year or £32 by Direct Debit. Rates for the unwaged remain at £15.

NEW FNF ONLINE PASSWORDS MEMBERS AND BRANCH

The password to the Members' Area of FNF Online has been changed. You can find the new password on the reverse of the branch meetings sheet enclosed with McKenzie.

The password to the branch area of the website has also changed. The new password will be posted in the branch area of the forum. You can also contact the office (0207 6135060) or Steve Stephenson.

ANTHONY DOUGLAS

McKenzie would like to correct an error in issue 81. We listed Cafcass Chief Executive Anthony Douglas as an OBE (like The Two Ronnies, Ken Dodd and Peter Cushing) when he is in fact a CBE (like Arthur Askey, Bruce Forsyth and Rolf Harris). Our apologies to Mr Douglas.

COLLABORATIVE LAW

For those unfamiliar, collaborative law is a form of alternative dispute resolution. You and the other party still use legal professionals, but you meet outside the courtroom with the intention of avoiding court entirely.

In theory, at least, collaborative law has many advantages over judicial proceedings, including being cheaper and quicker. However, it's a new approach and we'd like to know what the real experience is. If you've experience collaborative law, we'd be extremely pleased if you'd share your experiences with us - e-mail mckenzie@fnf.org.uk, call 0207 6135060, write to us (address on page 23) or post on the forum (see page 8)

The Happy Little Elves say...

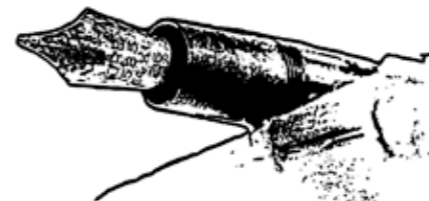


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www.fnf.org.uk/amazon

... and we've also not forgotten the wonderful range of FNF t-shirts, ties, badges, stickers, pens and Christmas cards available now at...

www.fnf.org.uk/shop or by calling 0207 6135060."



Letters and E-mails

Action on Elder Abuse

Readers of McKenzie know all about the difficulties that a non-resident parent (NRP) has in maintaining contact with children following the breakdown of the relationship between the parents. This dreadful phenomenon is the reason why FNF began and why it continues to do its very useful work. We know how the judicial system is stacked against people who want the best for their children in difficult circumstances. Some of us have heard of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) but to some this is merely a rather vague concept. I can tell you from my own experience that there can be appalling alienation between a father and his child following an acrimonious divorce or separation. Whether or not one calls it PAS it is a real thing and I want to write about my own experience. I was married in 1972 and over the next twelve years four children were born to us. There had been some problems between me and my wife mainly because of interference from her mother, which worsened when her father died. As I have 5 siblings, I was used to a large family and I wanted to have one of my own. Since my siblings were all boys it was doubly exciting for me that most of my children were girls, and also of course for my own mother. I was holding down a good job and I was the sole bread-winner. I had a health problem in that I have Usher Syndrome Type 2 which is a degeneration of the retina and also of the inner ear. I was able to hold down my job because it involved mainly brain power and a good memory. However, things became too difficult and I lost my job - albeit with a good redundancy package. You have probably guessed the next sentence! My wife chose that time to divorce me, claiming that I was a violent man.

Of course there was no evidence but that didn't matter. I was evicted from my home under an injunction and life became very, very difficult. I had considered myself very close to my children, especially my eldest Jane. The children were utterly bewildered over the divorce, especially as my wife refused to let me see them. OK, I had the normal "joint custody" and "defined contact" but we all know how difficult it is to enforce those. Jane defied her mother and saw me secretly as she was 13. She also gave me news about my other children. In fact Jane came to live with me for a while and only went back to her mother when her mother told her: "If you don't come back I can stop you seeing your siblings. I have stopped your father seeing them so I can easily stop you". You can imagine how I became very close to Jane. It's not difficult to realise that, after such a breakdown in trust caused by an acrimonious divorce, there is a very real need to trust someone - and I did. That trust however was misplaced and the main purpose of this article is to suggest to readers that however much one loves someone and trusts him/her, one must be wary. To cut a long story short, I was registered blind in 1992. I had managed to retrieve from the wreckage of the marriage a flat which was in very bad condition. It was my plan to rebuild the flat and I did this with the help of two mortgages. As it was my intention to leave that flat to my children in my will and because Jane had perfect sight it made sense to hand over the flat to her. I know it seems crazy now but it didn't at the time, back in 1994. Julie disappeared and I have only seen her once since then. In 2003 she tried to sell the flat but with the help of the Land Registry and because I had paid all the outgoings I demonstrated a beneficial interest in the flat and obtained a Caution against it being sold. Jane and I also signed a Declaration of Trust which

gave me the bulk of rent from the flat until my death when of course her ownership would be unencumbered. Unfortunately I was not able to enforce this DoT because of the legal costs involved. I have not received a penny from the flat following the DoT but instead have a costs order against me of over £6,000 imposed by the court after 2 hours hearing of my claim. It gets worse. Jane served a Statutory Demand on me and now there is a Hearing on 9 January in which she is seeking my bankruptcy. I am nowhere near bankrupt and Jane has £20,000 of mine from the rental of the flat but we all know how stupid the civil justice system is. I did have some luck in that I discovered Action on Elder Abuse and you can find their web site at www.elderabuse.org.uk AEA has achieved a great deal of attention since its foundation in 1993 because of individuals where there is an expectation of trust, e.g. relatives, care workers, etc. abusing "elders". The prevalence of abuse is far more common than people realise and includes physical, psychological, sexual, financial and neglect. A government UK study (2007) estimated 342,000 older people experience abuse within their own homes. I am 68. I myself have been interviewed by Channel 4, BBC television and Channel 5 as well as by a national newspaper. No article about me has yet been published mainly because the media is not sure whether my case is "sub judice". However AEA have an online petition calling the government for new laws to protect adults at risk of abuse and I would urge you all to pledge your support. I am writing a book about this whole saga and it will open many people's eyes.

Christopher Bray

Names in this letter have been changed

You can find out more about the Action on Elder Abuse and join their campaign at www.elderabuse.org.uk/Mainpages/Campaigns.htm



Letters and E-mails

Cafcass comeback

A good article and interview with Anthony Douglas in McKenzie 81. The questions were pertinent and well chosen. Mr Douglas's performance however was a hand-wringing, lame affair that was all mouth and no trousers. To summarise his (and therefore the Cafcass) point of view:

- He endorses resident parents who abuse their children by alienating them from their other parent. The children must be left alone with their abuser because the children are beyond help.
- Advice to resident parents who wish to weaponise their children? Get on with it! The quicker the better. The more you hurt your ex (the ex's hurt is merely collateral damage compared to the children's) the more likely you are to be able to completely cut him/her out of both your life and the children's.
- Make contact handover as painful as possible for all concerned – that way it will be curtailed even more, thus advancing the alienation of the hated ex.
- The new provisions in the Children & Adoption Act are pointless and what the alienating parents need are "programmes".

What Mr Douglas doesn't do is to provide anything meaningful or thoughtful by way of answers. FNF and associated organisations both past and present have formed out of the frustrations and despair of dealing with a complacent, under-funded, badly trained Family "Justice" System. Parental Alienation is what it's all about. Cafcass actually endorse it!

It is said of Mr Douglas that he has done a great job with Cafcass recently – well, don't toast him just yet, because almost any half-wit could improve Cafcass by an impressive degree from a starting point of zero. Let's see some positive proposals to address the evil of PA. Training may sound good but while it may be pos-

sible to lead the average alienating 'horse' to the water, it will be harder to make it drink. Why should they? They lost sight of their children's welfare long ago and now they are defending their own, which means making sure the children stay away from the NRP. Mr Douglas hints at a greater truth here however: that the alienating parents have developed personality disorders and should be treated as such by both the courts and Cafcass. But Mr Douglas apparently cannot admit this and (I hope I'm wrong) doesn't have the moral fibre to think this through any further.

Mr Douglas needs to start thinking long-term. What is in the best long-term interests of the children? Do they deserve two parents or is one enough? Is it OK for the NRP to be consigned to oblivion or reduced to some annoying Uncle-Daddy who is expected to be blissfully happy with any contact at all? We have a long way to go.

Aaron Donald

Do fathers need feminism? Continued...

As an old wave feminist and grandmother I was blown away by Becky's article 'Feminism needs Fathers' in McKenzie 80. Whilst battling in harder times for women in the 1980's I did a stint on our Community Health Council. Then, as now, many people couldn't see the connections between men's lives and women's rights. One very bad, and probably slightly mad, obstetrician/gynaecologist seemed to enjoy bullying women and even put our lives at risk with his cavalier attitude. He was tolerated by the powers-that-be and not seen as abnormal, just a bit of a character. But here's the thing: the women he hurt and damaged were wives of husbands, mothers of sons, daughters of fathers and sisters of brothers. Whole families were blighted and, while I couldn't prevent it, I was at least a thorn in his side for a long time.

More recently, having been banished from my grandchildren after decades of puzzlement and 'walking on eggshells', I was told by a helpful but expensive hypnotherapist about Parental Alienation Syndrome. Scales fell from my eyes and I set about getting all the affordable counselling help I could. This felt like a desperate effort to actually stay alive, such was the shock I was in at the time. The three middle-class women counsellors I found were gobsmackingly awful, twee and condescending.

My hunch is that being from an 'educated elite' is an important part of their identity. Unlike us feminists they haven't acknowledged what it is to be part of a culturally less powerful group nor worked through what this internalised oppression does to your identity and feeling of self-worth. They've kept all this tucked away where they keep the denied stuff. Don't get me wrong, there are brilliant women counsellors; I was unlucky to have been so sorely tried by these dreadful ones. You will be pleased to know that I eventually found an organisation that fixed me up with sessions with someone who helped me enormously to get back to the reasonably together person I used to be.

Anne Burge

Dear Becky,

Can we examine the Judith Evans/Becky Sibert proposition from McKenzie 81 that "Any feminist is committed to some form of reappraisal of the position of women in society"? In theory this could be true. The practicalities however are somewhat different and tie in with the assertion that "the shared quality of domestic and public life means that one cannot be understood without consideration of the other..." Quite! But herein lies the dichotomy.

While feminists have been campaigning for decades for equality in the workplace and we constantly hear

of problems relating to 'the glass ceiling'; women have been unwilling and in many cases unable to yield any of their power in the home. In other words, the 'glass ceiling' which by and large has been shattered or at least severely cracked by women in the workplace, has not even been scratched by the male in the home. This is because the management structure at work which has pushed through these changes does not exist in the home. The female, the mother, is the management!

As far back as when man was a hunter/gatherer he was the force 'at work'; while the woman was the force 'at home'. Even in very paternal societies like the Arab world, in the running of the home, mother is boss. These are therefore deeply embedded traits in the human psyche. Insisting on striving for equality in public and at work; yet resisting any change

in the balance of power in the home, is where I believe feminism has got it badly wrong.

How many men will empathise with the following anecdote? After the end of my marriage I lived with Diana for 7 years. On going to the supermarket I always had to put all the food from the trolley into cardboard boxes because if I put them into carrier bags that was 'wrong' and I was in trouble. Then when I joined up with my present partner, I did what I had done for seven years and suddenly that was 'wrong' because she wanted me to use carrier bags. Both methods were apparently equally wrong for different women. In my marriage we actually had a family joke which, I must admit, I found equally amusing. It was telling the children: "Go and find out what Daddy's doing, and tell him not to!"

Yes, fathers will do child care differently from mothers. Yes, they will do things around the house and in the garden differently and do things she doesn't approve of. But until it is socially acceptable for men to do these things differently without them being considered 'wrong'; until we get to a stage of some equality in the home, where men's different approach is not considered a cause for merriment among womenfolk discussing how 'hopeless' he is; we will not get anywhere near cracking the domestic 'glass ceiling', nor achieving the understanding that fathers' input in the home is different, but equally valid, to mothers'. If and when that happens, we may also find that the divorce rate and therefore the rate at which children are torn apart from one parent; starts to decline.

Anthony Esler
FNF East Anglia.

Reviews

Single Parents: The Essential Guide

Sarah Edwards
Need2Know Books, 2008
ISBN: 1861440553

Need2Know Books publish a number of useful guides for young people, parents, teachers, and professionals. Of particular interests to parents are well-put-together guides on ADHD, adoption and fostering, child obesity, special needs, stress, and many others.

Many readers of McKenzie will be interested by their recent publication on single parenting. This book deals with the huge, unexpected life change that happens when someone becomes a single parent. I think that this will be useful not only for parents that have children with them for the majority of the time, but also those that are classed as "non resident parents", as it helps them to have some understanding of what their ex is going through. Often, non-resident parents will be so caught up with the anger and frustration of being denied contact, that they will overlook what their ex is dealing with. The guide is well laid out, accessible and has some very helpful material on dealing with the emotional rollercoaster that results from bereavement or separation. There is well-written

guidance on budgeting, time management, looking after yourself (including stress, relaxation, diet, and exercise), keeping the house in order, seeking support, and dating again. Whilst the guide talks about "single parenting" throughout, it would be equally relevant to those that have a shared parenting arrangement.

Alex Borchardt
FNF Member & Helpline Coordinator

'Fragmenting Fatherhood: A Socio-Legal Study'

Richard Collier and Sally Sheldon
Hart Publishing, 2008
978-1-84113-417-8

'Fragmenting Fathers' is a wide ranging study and commentary on changes in family structure and its interactions with law, set down in seven chapters, each concluding with authors' comments.

In the introduction, the authors pose the question, do families need fathers? In the early 20th century, fatherhood was defined simply as the role of the breadwinner, and motherhood as staying at home to care for and raise children. Through the century these two roles have become broader so that notions of father and

gender roles increasingly overlap. Some of the rights and responsibilities derived from marriage now apply to unmarried cohabitation. Family structures have changed so much that legislators have deliberated at length and foresee children born legally fatherless having two mothers, a notion of gender exclusion in contrast with gender convergence. The authors draw attention to the comment of the Joint Parliamentary Committee charged with scrutinizing legislation, that in assisted reproduction, while preferring a two-parent model, single parenthood should not be discriminated against; and later they refer to gender confusion at Parliamentary level! They also note how terminology in family law has been redefined, such that each term has meaning depending on the context. The term 'fatherhood' is now an uncertain concept.

The study has extensive notes with accompanying Bibliography of 602 names. The inclusion of an index would have been helpful to the reader, as would a list of the main Statutes cited. The style is academic, but worded for the concerned reader. The book is recommended reading for trustees of societies and charities concerned with the effects of family breakdown and parent-child relationships.

Reg George
FNF Volunteer Member

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For professional support and expertise in Career Management contact Paul Weaser FCIPD 07762 629850 paulweaser@versheena.co.uk
(Paul, an FNF member, has 25 years HR experience in the private and public sectors and will donate some of his fees to FNF)

Hello, Families Need Fathers...

FNF Helpline Coordinator Alex Borchardt tells us about his work.

December marks one year since I joined the staff of Families Need Fathers, and it's been an incredible twelve months that have gone past far too quickly!

I had been involved with FNF for a couple of years via the Exeter branch but this year has given me a great opportunity to meet hundreds of our members all around the country. I am very proud to be part of this organisation and to see how well regarded we are by other charities, companies, professionals, and politicians working in the family arena. I have visited several local branches throughout the year and it is great to see how many thriving groups we have.

The national helpline and the branches complement each other well. The helpline is there as a point of "first aid" for people contacting our charity for the first time, as well as being available for established members that are unable to make it to their local branch meetings. Callers to the helpline are usually asked where they are from and invited to the next meeting at their local branch - and many end up becoming actively involved. At the same

time, several volunteers that have become well established with their branches have used their personal experiences and those of others they have met to good effect in becoming helpline volunteers themselves.

The helpline has ambitious targets for expansion. Hundreds of callers every week contact us. Demand almost always outstrips availability of the volunteers and I am therefore delighted to welcome Anne, Dot, Martin, Peter, Paul and Marjorie... and another Paul to our team. Not only does this give us much needed backup for the existing service of 6-10 on weekday evenings, but the goal of providing coverage during the day time and at weekends is starting to become a reality.

If you are interested in becoming an FNF helpline volunteer (training and equipment provided) please contact me on alex.borchardt@fnf.org.uk or on 0207 613 5060.



Grandparents Action Group

working to maintain and protect relationships between grandparents and grandchildren.
Pam Wilson, Chair: 01952 582 621
GAGJASPER@aol.com

Family Rights Group

Providing advice and support for families whose children are involved with Social Services.
www.frg.org.uk 0800 731 1696

For Hugh McMichael

(FNF member for 13 years)

My father sailed alone in brutal sea
In breaching tides and maelstrom he sustained
A tranquil heart for children far from here
In pocket a compass always contained
The needle instinctive pointed to me
For I wrapped around him a tourniquet
Asphyxiating and comforting he
When black desperation turned gold one day
His treasure found him beneath a shipwreck
And cloaked him precious in jewels of respite
Together we went the curative trek
Through sands of regret in such dismal light
But father! we are moon and stars at last
To guide lost sailors through brutal sea past

With love for you on your birthday and for many years to come, from your daughter Hazel.

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McKenzie

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Christmas Edition

EDITOR:
Nick Barnard

Thanks to proof readers
Jenny Cuttriss, Jon Davies,
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CHRISTMAS CANCELLED?!?

Santa grounded as sleigh licence confiscated

The world stood shocked today as it was announced that billions of presents, as well as incalculable festive cheer, would go undelivered due to Santa Claus being unable to drive his big shiny red sleigh all around the world in just one night, as he has done for countless Christmases past.

Santa, who split from his wife Doreen Claus in 1998 after 115 years of marriage, had been paying maintenance for their three children, aged eternally four, five and nine, through the Infant Cash Enterprise, the Laplandic equivalent of the Child Support Agency. However, as Mr Claus has failed to make payment on more than one occasion in the second half of 2008, ICE has exercised its power to confiscate his sleigh operator's licence – leaving huge stockpiles of toys, games and sweets in limbo and Santa with no means to make a living. It is also unclear what the consequences will be for Santa's reindeer team, Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Blitzen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and the other one.

Professor Geraint Melon of King's College London has estimated that up to **TEN BILLION** tears could be shed as a result, and also pointed to the "tragic waste" of up to **900 MILLION** mince pies, carrots and glasses of sherry.

Mr Claus told the Pole Star, "Obviously the Christmas thing is a lucrative job but it's a once-a-year gig and



my cashflow tends to reflect that. With the credit crunch, the price of wooden trains and bouncy balls has risen sharply, so I'd had to delay a few maintenance payments. Doreen understood, but the next thing I know, there's a letter from ICE saying that my sleigh licence has been revoked and that's that. I don't know what I'm going to do – there aren't that many other jobs up here at the North Pole

and none that don't involve sleighing. I feel so sorry for the kids."

A spokesman for the Department of All Things Special & Magical said that the Christmas distribution responsibilities would be put out to tender, but that it did not expect any deliveries to be made until "the end of February or March, 2011, that is."

THE REAL STORY

The story above is, of course, a joke. However, what is not a joke is that thousands of children will be unfairly denied the opportunity to spend what should be one of the most wonderful times of the year, with one of their parents and countless other family members. It is not a joke that there are inherent problems within our family justice system, as well other agencies, which keep parents and children apart

unnecessarily. It is not a joke that to restrict a child's loving relationship with a parent is still accepted by society. It is not a joke that Families Need Fathers will keep working and fighting, day after day, year after year, until this is put right.

All we want for Christmas is for everyone to recognise, from Westminster to Warminster, that both parents matter.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM FAMILIES NEED FATHERS.