

1) Fundamental beliefs

Our charity was founded in 1974, initially as a group of people who became friends through having a shared problem – their children were being prevented from having ‘access’ (the term then) to them.

Our name reflects our origins all those years ago.

We subsequently became a charity whose mission was to support the right of *children* to a full and free relationship with *both* their parents and their families both sides – unless there was a reason otherwise.

We are now the largest and most reputable of the charities advocating the children’s rights in this respect.

Like most charities we have a two-fold aim. **The first is social welfare work.** We support parents and other family members whose children, grandchildren or relatives are prevented from seeing them. We try and help them first to get, and then to use for the best, enough parenting time with the children. Our direct work is with the adults, but it is on behalf of the children. Excluded parents are mostly fathers, but when fathers get control of their children, they sometimes stop the children seeing their mother and her family. Then it is her whom we support. Half the children are of course girls, and their wider family -often excluded at the same time as a parent -contain as many women as men.

We are not a sex or gender-based organisation. What we are against is the *lone parent model*. The assumption that when parents split up, they should be divided into two categories. One who has or should have all or nearly all responsibility for the children, the other of whom is an optional, if sometimes desirable, add-on.

Our second aim is to prevent the problem at source. We would like to see everyone – principally parents of course, but also all parties to decision about post separation parenting - act according to the rights of children in this respect. Family Court judges and magistrates, CAFCASS officers, social workers, people working in schools and nurseries, in health and welfare services and everyone who deals with these issues. This is educational and lobbying work.

We are a conventional and constitutional charity. We seek to persuade, using evidence and argument, not to coerce or disrupt.

Fundamental to our work is the principle stated in the *Children Act 1989* that the welfare of children should be the paramount consideration in all decisions about their future. The weakness, as well as the strength of that, is that it states no implications. Almost any outcome can pass, provided the mantra ‘the welfare of the children’ is mentioned.

Our charity’s interpretation is based on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Many countries have incorporated this into their domestic law. The UK has ratified the convention but not given it legal force, nor does it respect it in the way that concerns us. In several particulars, but especially Article 9. This states that no child should be denied a relationship with a parent against their will unless there has been a ruling of a ‘competent authority subject to judicial review’ that this would not promote their welfare.

2) How we operate

a) Support meetings

No-one currently active knows when the London Branch was set up. At least 35 years ago. For nearly 25 years there has been a monthly clinic at which a solicitor has given free advice. It was the firm Anthony Gold but is now Goodman Ray. Warm thanks to both.

We have meetings weekly, apart from over Christmas and Bank holiday Mondays. At the time of writing (January 2021) these are suspended because of the Covid-19 Lockdown and the closure of our venue.

Anyone who seeking help or wanting just to observe is welcome to attend, subject to the consent of the meeting if they wish to report on it outside. There is no charge, but we get a free venue in return for attenders buying a drink. You will be invited, but not compelled, to join the charity and to contribute to a whip round for branch funds.

All meetings are hosted by an experienced committee member.

You will be asked a series of questions about your situation, so that all attenders have basic information, but nothing that will reveal your or your children's identity. (for example, first name only, areas of residence but not addresses...). Then you will be asked how we can help. The host will respond and ask other attenders for their comments and suggestions. None of this is 'advice' if that is interpreted as being based on professional authority or training or which could give rise to legal liability. It is your responsibility to assess its value and applicability to your situation. But some is based on considerable experience.

If courts orders and Cafcass and other reports etc are relevant, you are asked to bring them along. They will only be seen by experienced and responsible people who obey court confidentiality.

Newcomers are given priority, then people with something about to happen, and then others. At the end of the usually 2 hour formal (Chatham House Rule) meeting there is then informal discussions and networking.

b) Papers of suggestions to help excluded parents

You should find the following, written by one of our committee members. The first two are also on the FNF national website.

- 1) About how to argue for parenting time for your children.
- 2) Parental Alienation.
- 3) By Stuart Graham: The psychology and legal advantage of false allegations of Domestic Abuse.
- 4) How to get the best CAFCASS report for your children and yourself. This is for its overall stance on how to approach enquiries. Once FNF's 'best seller, it is now *out of date* as far as *terminology, CAFCASS procedures and social research is concerned*. To update it is on our to-do list.
- 5) The Social Policy case for Shared Parenting. This is again *dated*, but still contains useful material.

We hope to add more!

c) Workshops and events

Over the last few years this branch has organised day workshops.

The one on **Parental Alienation** resulted in the most prominent publicity the charity has ever had – an aspect was the front page lead in the Guardian newspaper. Some of the material presented is elsewhere on this site in video format.

The same is true of the second workshop, on **Allegations of Domestic Abuse**. Of particular interest for our support work is the contribution from Stuart Hontree on *How to counter false allegations*.

We have two more workshops planned. One is currently organised for Saturday **3rd October 2020** on **Surviving Family Break-up, Contact Denial and the Family Courts**. This is planned to include a presentation by Kim Beatson, former Chair of Resolution, of Anthony Gold Solicitors on **Findings of Fact** but the primary focus is on promoting your own welfare, employment and housing position during these very stressful times.

Also on the stocks for 2021 is another workshop **Contact Denial is Child Abuse**.

These are mainly funded by the voluntary whip rounds at our support meetings. These have of course dried up.

Please go to the 'Donate' page to enable us to continue with them.

d) Stimulating debate about what needs doing

We are a branch of the National Charity. One thing we try to do is make suggestions about their policy and actions.

See their website for their response

Go to [the relevant section of this website] for the following

A proposal for the reform of Family Law

A policy on domestic abuse (It is an old paper of the National Charity but appears not to have been updated)

Ideas for mitigating the effect on child welfare of the recent changes in legal aid and the treatment of allegations of domestic abuse. This paper arises from suggestions that emerged at our workshop.