

# Evaluation of FAMILY RIGHTS GROUP'S ADVICE SERVICE 2010

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## INTRODUCTION

Family Rights Group, a registered charity, offers a confidential advice line for families and other interested parties in England and Wales. The line, which is free to callers, offers advice to parents and others whose children are involved with social care services. It also sends out written information and advice sheets to families and others who require further clarification of the issues. The advice line, which is just one of the services offered by Family Rights Group, is available from 10am to 3.30pm, Monday to Friday. It is a confidential service, although where information is revealed that leads the adviser to think that a child 'is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm', she will encourage the caller to refer the matter to the appropriate agency, or if the caller is unwilling to do so, the adviser may pass the information on to the relevant agency and in so doing, notify the caller accordingly.

Evaluation of telephone support is vital at a time of increasing demand for evidence-based practice. Research has shown the importance of parenting support to improving child well-being, achievement and adjustment (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003) as well as the importance of ensuring that support is perceived both positively by the recipient and in a way that allows parents to feel 'in control' (Ghate and Hazel, 2002). We also know from the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study (see, for example, Dishion et al 1999) that care must be taken to ensure that interventions do not do more harm than good.

There is, however, already evidence to suggest that telephone support can be effective. For example, In the US, a randomised controlled study of parent-to-parent support for those with children with disabilities found that it improved parental acceptance of family and disability, improved parental coping levels, and made a significant difference in parental perception of their needs being met (Singer 2004). Similarly, a randomised control trial of a telephone support

intervention with family care givers in Canada found that users felt that telephone support had made a positive impact on their lives, in providing them with previously unavailable emotional support, information, and affirmation and in enabling them to be more proactive in dealing with challenges (Steward, Neufeld et al, 2004). More recently, research showed that telephone support in the UK had also improved parenting over a range of domains, with those receiving support having significantly lower scores on the GHQ-12 (Goldberg 1992), suggesting that they were less distressed (Ritchie 2006).

This evaluation sought to establish how well the advice line meets the needs of its users, to identify any gaps in service provision, and to explore the extent to which it provides the service that Family Rights Group aspires to when it says:

‘We aim to help people to understand their rights, and explore the issues which have arisen between the family and children's social care services, in order that they may make realistic choices about the options available to them.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from [http://www.frg.org.uk/advice\\_service.html](http://www.frg.org.uk/advice_service.html)

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample**

Data for this research came from a sample of 50 respondents who had used the Family Rights Group advice line between 1 July 2009 and 31 July 2010. Callers to the advice line between the above dates were asked at the end of their call whether they would be willing to participate in an evaluation of the service. The forenames and telephone numbers of those who were willing to take part in an evaluation were then forwarded to the researcher. Quota sampling was used to ensure that those contacted broadly reflected the proportion of type of call made to the advice line. Time and resource implications limited the number of those who could then be contacted, but, with the above caveats, the sample was randomly selected from the telephone numbers forwarded to OXSRAG.

Potential respondents were then contacted by telephone, and asked whether they would be willing to take part in an evaluation of Family Rights Group's advice line. It was made clear to the respondents that the researcher was not a member of Family Rights Group but an independent evaluator, and that all information would be held anonymously, with respondents free to decline any question or to stop the interview at any point.

### **Measures**

The questionnaire incorporated questions designed to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, two specific measures were used:

#### *The General Health Questionnaire-12*

The GHQ was designed by Goldberg (1978) to identify non-psychotic psychiatric disorder in people in both community and medical settings using a self-report questionnaire. The GHQ-12 (Goldberg 1992) is a shortened version but is equally valid and reliable. Studies have shown GHQ scores to be highly correlated with clinical diagnoses. Goldberg and Williams (1988) note that for

studies using the GHQ-12, correlation coefficients varied between 0.71 and 0.91 with a median of 0.86. Although designed to evaluate 'current state', it has demonstrated significant predictive validity with regard to the future use of mental health care (Berwick et al, 1987). Satisfactory internal consistency has been shown by both split-half and Cronbach's alpha analyses (Goldberg and Williams, 1988). In this research, in line with the Health Survey for England, a cut off score of 4 or above using the bimodal scoring method has been used to identify elevated scores, indicating a high level of psychological distress.

### **Data**

The questionnaire contained a balance of closed and open questions, and generated both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach of complementarities allows the two research strategies to be employed so that different aspects of findings can be dovetailed to draw out meaning (Hammersley 1996). Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS, whilst qualitative data was analysed thematically, and helped to give meaning to the quantitative findings.

### **Ethics**

The research was undertaken in accordance with the ethical codes of the British Association of Social Workers and the Social Research Association.

### **Limitations**

Of those who agreed to take part when they originally rang the advice line, one declined to take part in the evaluation with no reason given and one said that she was too ill to take part. Two further respondents withdrew before completing the questionnaires: one with a caller at the door, and one because she felt it was too much for her to do at that point. The evaluation suffers to some extent from a small sample size (N=50). However, the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods lends validity to the findings, which stand on their own merits.



When considering the qualitative data, it should be borne in mind that this is based on self report. It may be impossible to know 'the truth'. Nevertheless these are the views of respondents whose views are rarely heard in the public domain, and for this reason alone they deserve to be heard.

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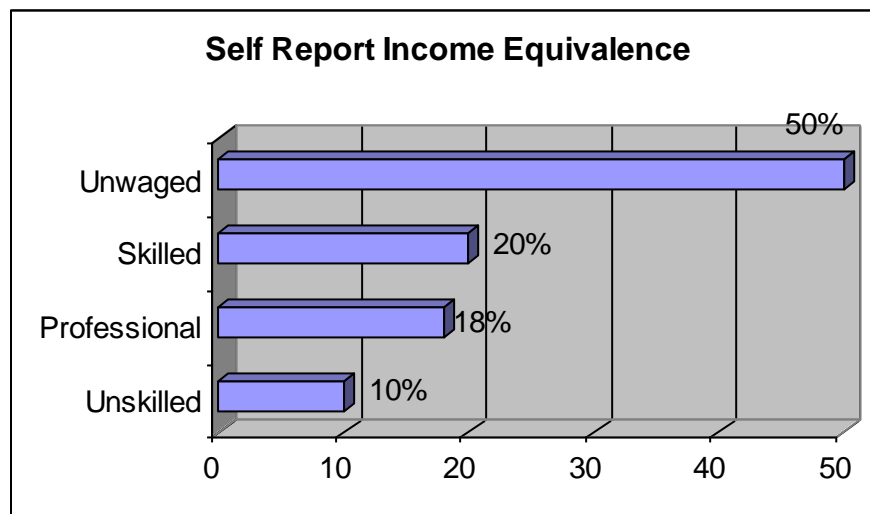


## CHAPTER 1

### RESPONDENT PROFILE

Of respondents, the majority (54%) were parents (23% fathers; 77% mothers), with the remainder being either kinship carers (22%) or relatives without care (24%). Just over a quarter of respondents were male (26%) with 74% female, with the majority (60%) married or living with a partner. Respondent self report of household income and equivalence revealed that half of the sample was unwaged, including those on benefits and state pensions only.

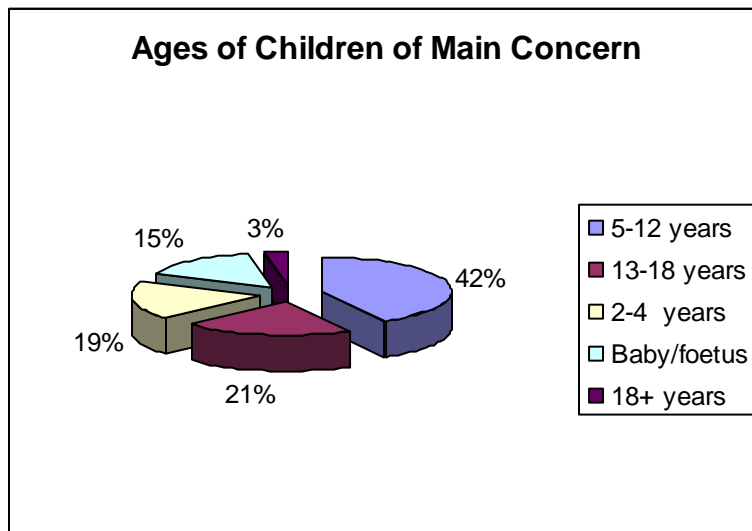
**Fig.1.1**



Only 46% of the sample knew their household income in monetary terms, with the mean income being £21,239. As expected, there was a significant correlation ( $p < .01$ ) between marital status and income, with lone or single respondents being much more likely to be on low incomes.

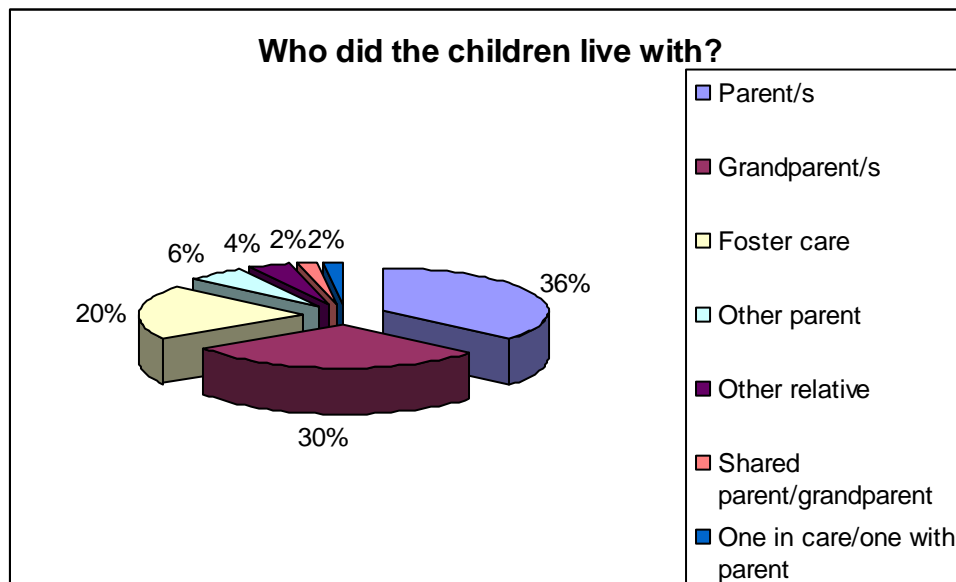
Most callers were aged between 35 and 50 (42%), with 32% being over 50 and 26% being aged between 21 and 35. The majority of children who were the subject of concern were aged between 5 and 12.

**Fig 1.2**



Just under half of all respondents (48%) had their children living with them, but not all of these were parents. Although most of the parents who called had their children living with them, many of the callers were not parents (46%) and 30% of children in this sample lived with their grandparents.

Fig. 1.3



### Ethnic origin

Respondent self report of ethnic status showed the following.

Table 1.1

### Self Report of Ethnic Status

White British	80%
Black British	4%
Mixed White & Asian	2%
Other mixed	4%
Other Asian	2%
Black Caribbean	2%
Black African	4%
Other ethnic background	2%
Total	100%

Wohland et al (2010) note that in 2001 White British accounted for 87% of England's population and ethnic minorities 13%, but that by 2007 the proportion of ethnic minorities had increased to 16%. In this sample, the proportion was larger, at 20% and may be accounted for by the link between low earnings, ethnicity and social services contact (Bebbington and Miles 1989) reflected in the disproportionately high number of children from ethnic minorities (27%) in care (DCSF 2009).<sup>2</sup>

### **Psychological functioning and stressors**

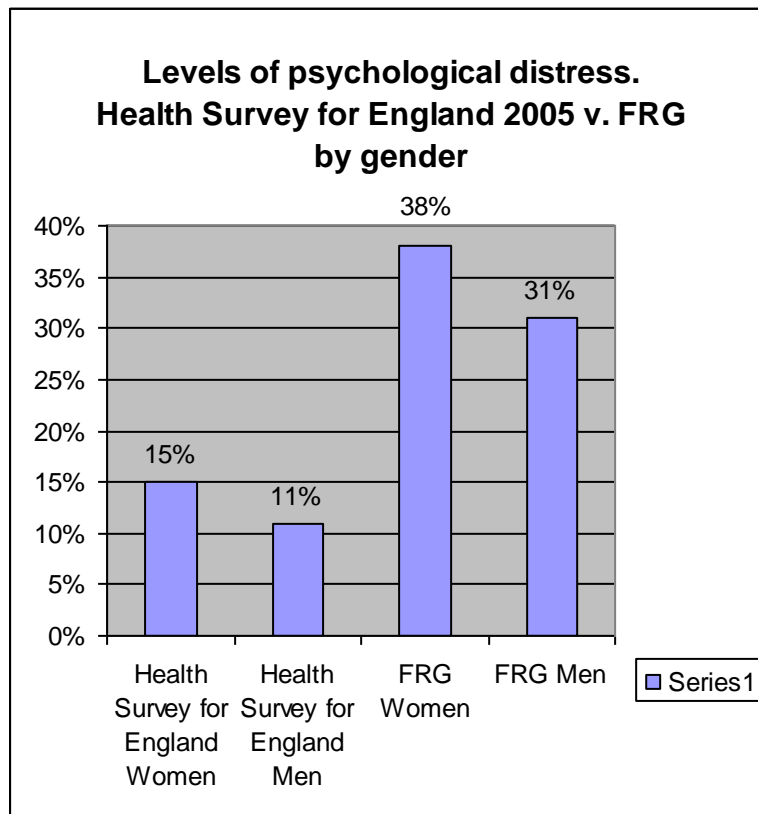
Parental mental health was assessed using the General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12) (Goldberg 1992). As Hankins (2010) notes, it was designed to screen for general (non-psychotic) psychiatric morbidity (Goldberg and Williams 1988). It has been widely used and validated in general and clinical populations worldwide (Werneke et al 2000). Using GHQ (bimodal) scoring, a score of 4 or more shows a high level of psychological distress. The Health Survey for England 2005 and the Scottish Health Survey for 2003 both used the GHQ-12 with the same cut off point of 4 or more (GHQ bimodal). Both surveys reported women having higher scores than men. In England 15% of women had a high score of 4 or more compared with 11% of men, and in Scotland the figures were 17% for women compared with 13% for men.

In this sample, a high proportion, 36% of respondents had scores of 4+ using GHQ bimodal scoring. Although the ratios were similar cross gender, they were almost double those found in the two Health Surveys, with 31% of men and 38% of women having high scores indicating high levels of psychological distress.

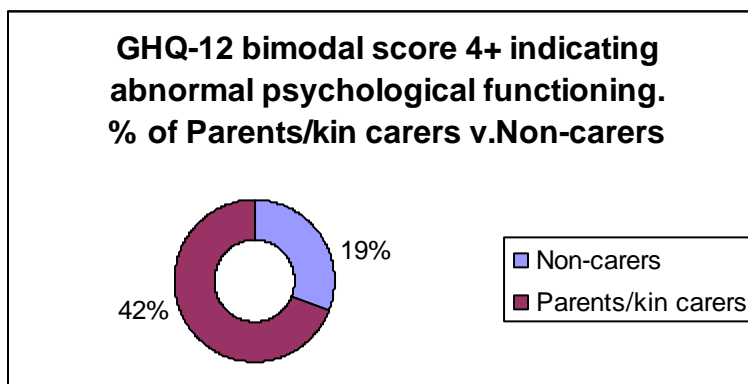
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<sup>2</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2009*. Statistical First Release. London: DCSF

Fig 1.4



There was an inverse relationship between GHQ-12 scores and income, with those reporting unskilled or unwaged income levels being more likely to have higher GHQ-12 scores. Of parents or kinship carers, 42% had scores of 4+ indicating high levels of psychological distress, compared with only 19% of those who were non-carers. The findings, however, were not statistically significant.

**Fig 1.5**

### Key Findings

- The majority of respondents (54%) were parents, with the remainder being either kinship carers (22%) or relatives without care (24%).
- Just over a quarter of respondents were male (26%) with 74% female.
- The majority (60%) of respondents were married or living with a partner.
- Half of the sample were unwaged (including those on benefits and state pensions only).
- Lone or single respondents were much more likely to be on low incomes ( $p < .01$ ).



- The majority of children who were the subject of concern were aged between 5 and 12.
- Although most of the parents who called had their children living with them, many of the callers were not parents (46%) and 30% of children in this sample lived with their grandparents
- A high proportion, 36% of respondents had scores of 4+ using GHQ bimodal scoring - almost double those found in the Health Survey for England 2005 and the Health Survey for Scotland 2003.
- There was an inverse relationship between GHQ-12 scores and income, with those reporting unskilled or unwaged income levels being more likely to have higher GHQ-12 scores.
- Of parents or kinship carers, 42% had GHQ-12 bimodal scores of 4+ indicating high levels of psychological distress, compared with only 19% of those who were non-carers.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT WERE THEIR CONCERNS?

Quota sampling was used to ensure that those contacted broadly reflected the proportion of type of call made to the advice line (see Methodology).

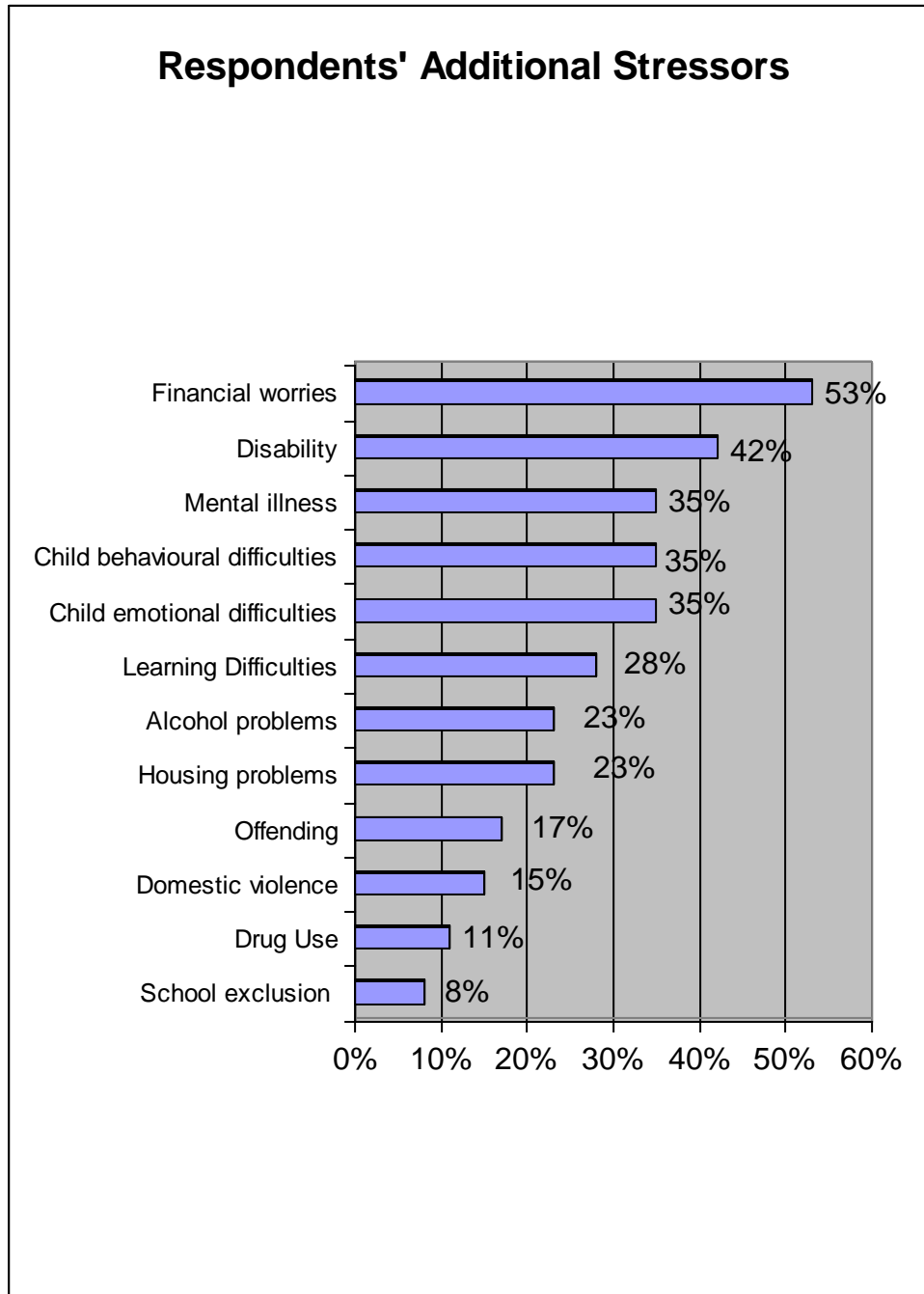
**Table 2.1**

#### Category of Callers' Main Concern

Care Related issues	24%
Family Support	22%
Child Protection	36%
Looked After Children	14%
Adoption	4%
Total	100%

However, most respondents had key additional stressors in their lives.

**Fig 2.1**



#### Those Whose Main Concern was Care Proceedings

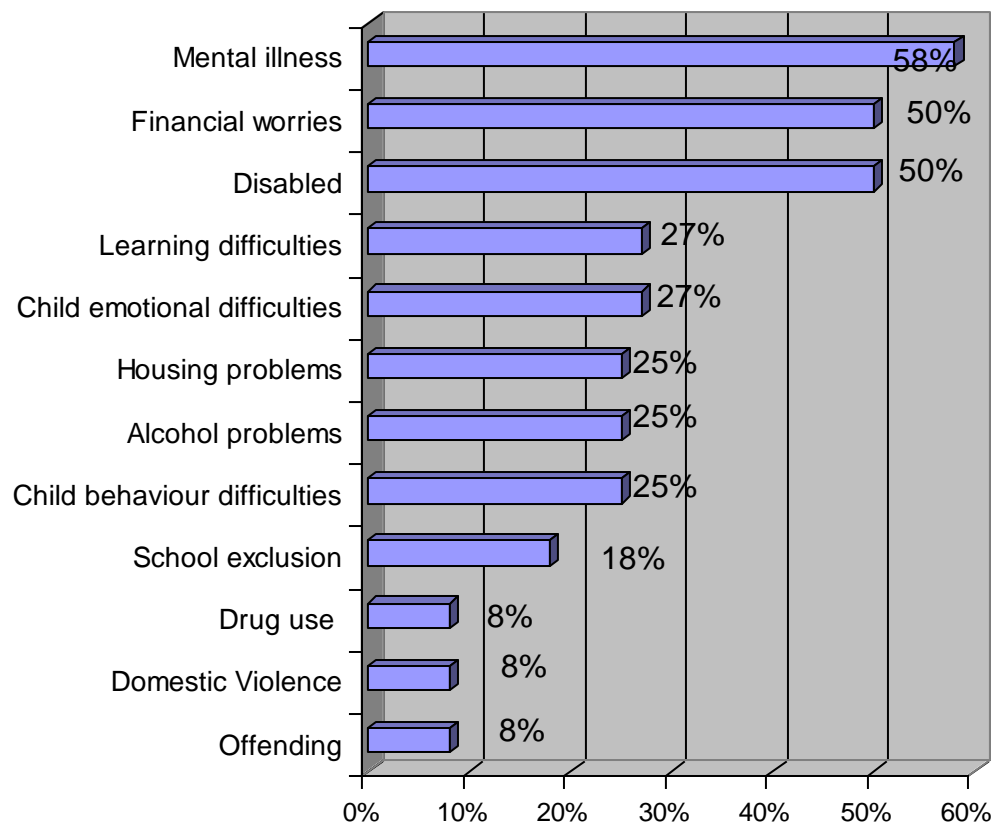
Perhaps not surprisingly (Bebbington and Miles 1989), none of those whose main concern related to care proceedings or related issues had professional

incomes, with 50% reporting skilled incomes, 25% unskilled and 25% unwaged. The majority of these respondents were married or partnered (64%). Just under half of these respondents (42%) had GHQ-12 scores of 4+ using bimodal scoring, suggesting substantial psychological distress. While there is a genetic component to many forms of mental illness, there are also factors in the environment (including the family) that can activate that risk. Single chronic stresses seem to carry little or no risk, but where they occur in combination the risk of disorder is likely to increase so that it is greater than the sum of the effects of the stresses considered individually (Rutter et al, 1975). Rodgers (1990) also noted from his prospective longitudinal study of more than 1,000 women, that childhood disorders are associated with adult psychopathology only when there are precipitating environmental stresses in adult life.

In this sample, amongst respondents involved in care proceedings, 67% experienced three or more of the stressors identified in Figure 2.1, including 58% with mental health issues (with which care issues were significantly correlated  $p < .05$ ), 50% with financial worries, and 50% with disability related problems.

## **Fig 2.2**

### The additional stressors of respondents whose main concern was care proceedings



What were they most concerned about?

Where callers were concerned principally about care-related issues, thematic analysis of the qualitative data suggested four main themes: (1) callers not understanding their situation, (2) wanting to know how to acquire contact or the return of a child, (3) issues for grandparents, and (4) a sense of injustice. Not surprisingly themes also overlapped and intertwined.

### **1) Callers who did not understand their rights or situation and wanted clarification**

When children are taken into care under section 31 of the Children Act 1989, it is clearly distressing both for parents and the extended family. Once a child is in care, the local authority and the Court will have responsibility for determining the extent to which parents or other family members exercise 'parental responsibility' under the Children Act 1989. Whilst the Children Act 1989 makes the welfare of the child of paramount importance, in terms of the health of the nation and a reduction in health inequalities, it is also important that adults concerned with that child achieve the best possible outcomes as adults in so far as achieving that does not impinge on the child's welfare. Social work training requires social workers to be empowering, anti-oppressive and enabling, working in partnership with parents and agencies. This research suggests that there is a gap in either social work professional knowledge or training, which leaves many of the most vulnerable, and particularly grandparents, desperately searching for reliable, independent advice.

The quotations below, taken from different respondents, illustrate this point:

a) 'I didn't know where I stood. I wanted legal advice on our legal situation and the intricacies of the situation.'

- b) 'There are two local authorities involved. Mine passes everything back to the other local authority, where the child was, so nothing gets done. We just take every day as it comes'.
- c) 'I wanted to know what everything meant. It wasn't explained to me. I wanted to know in the proper way: the ins and outs – how it really is.'
- d) 'There was general confusion about what I should do and what I could do'.
- e) 'I didn't really understand anything – meetings, conferences or any of it. I had no idea what social services were looking for.'
- f) 'When I rang I just wanted advice. We knew nothing and social services wouldn't even listen to us. They know best.'
- g) 'Social services aren't communicating with me at all. They refuse to communicate.'

## **2) Callers who wanted more contact/return of child**

Contact issues were clearly distressing for many of these respondents, whose lack of information and frustration had led them to call the advice line:

- a) 'I needed to know how to apply for custody. I was very confused by the system. Social Workers don't tell you anything. They removed the children without telling me anything. I needed legal advice.'
- b) 'I was very disappointed with the way social services handled my case. They didn't want to listen to me. They ignored me. They take me to be a stupid man. I contacted Family Rights Group to try to get my daughter back from care to live with me'.



c) 'My nephew doesn't know his dad and his mother was deported. He's been in care since he was seven years old and he's been there now for three or four years. . . .Initially the plan was for him to live with me, but that changed without reason. Social services restricted contact with me but he is coming for two weeks in August. I keep in touch by phone. I don't want to disrupt him, so the issues were: did I have the right to have him live with me, and can social services decide contact?'

d) A grandparent with care of grandchild:

'Social services are concerned about my son. They want me to stop seeing him. It's his behaviour. He has a mental illness that has been ongoing since he was a child. It's difficult for me, as he has problems and suicidal thoughts. I can't cut him off'.

e) 'I'm still trying to take them (children) back because they've taken them for nothing. Social services have taken the children from me. I understand their concerns, but I've separated from the father'

f) 'My daughter had been in foster care but when I rang (Family Rights Group) she was living with her grandmother. I wanted her to come home. I was looking at what action it was possible to take.'

g) A grandparent:

'The local authority planned to place the children in foster care, but we thought they would be better off with us.'

h) 'I rang to see whether there's any way to get them back'.

i) 'I wanted to know how I could get my children back and what I could do to help myself.'

### **3) Grandparents' concerns**

Grandparents were often seen as a resource, whilst they themselves in turn seemed to find their own needs (and by implication those of the child) overlooked. Some illustrations of the points made are given below:

a) 'I wanted advice. My grandson was abandoned. His mother was a lone parent. Social services rang me and he arrived two hours later.'

b) 'Social services decided to remove the children from the parents and they didn't inform us or contact us at any stage.'

c) 'I wanted to know about my rights as a grandparent. I'd been seeing him one hour a week. I was totally confused by the system. I was trying to do the best for him but you need the information to make good decisions. People tell me different things. Some say I have rights as a grandmother, others say I don't.'

d) 'The local authority applied to court to remove the children. Family Rights Group gave us all the information we needed to fight the case. Social services didn't want us to have the children. They were very surprised when the judge let us take the children home with us. My daughter's barrister was very helpful on the day, but we had made an application to Court with the information we'd been given by Family Rights Group.'

### **4) A sense of injustice**

Many of these callers also identified a sense of injustice, and had rung the advice line to see whether there was any way their case might be helped. In general, injustice underpins all other themes identified here.

a) 'I was trying to get help because I was being bullied by social services. When I was meant to see the children, they'd call a meeting when I was at work, and so it was causing me financial difficulties. At the meeting they'd upset me and then judge me. I was really worried about my little boy and he's hurt himself since being in care. He also has asthma and they didn't know and then they rang me and asked me what to do. I can help, but they can't help me . . . . I can't even get counselling because there are court proceedings. No-one can help me.'

b) 'I wanted to know what rights I had. I don't get a say in any decision. My parental responsibility has been taken away from me.'

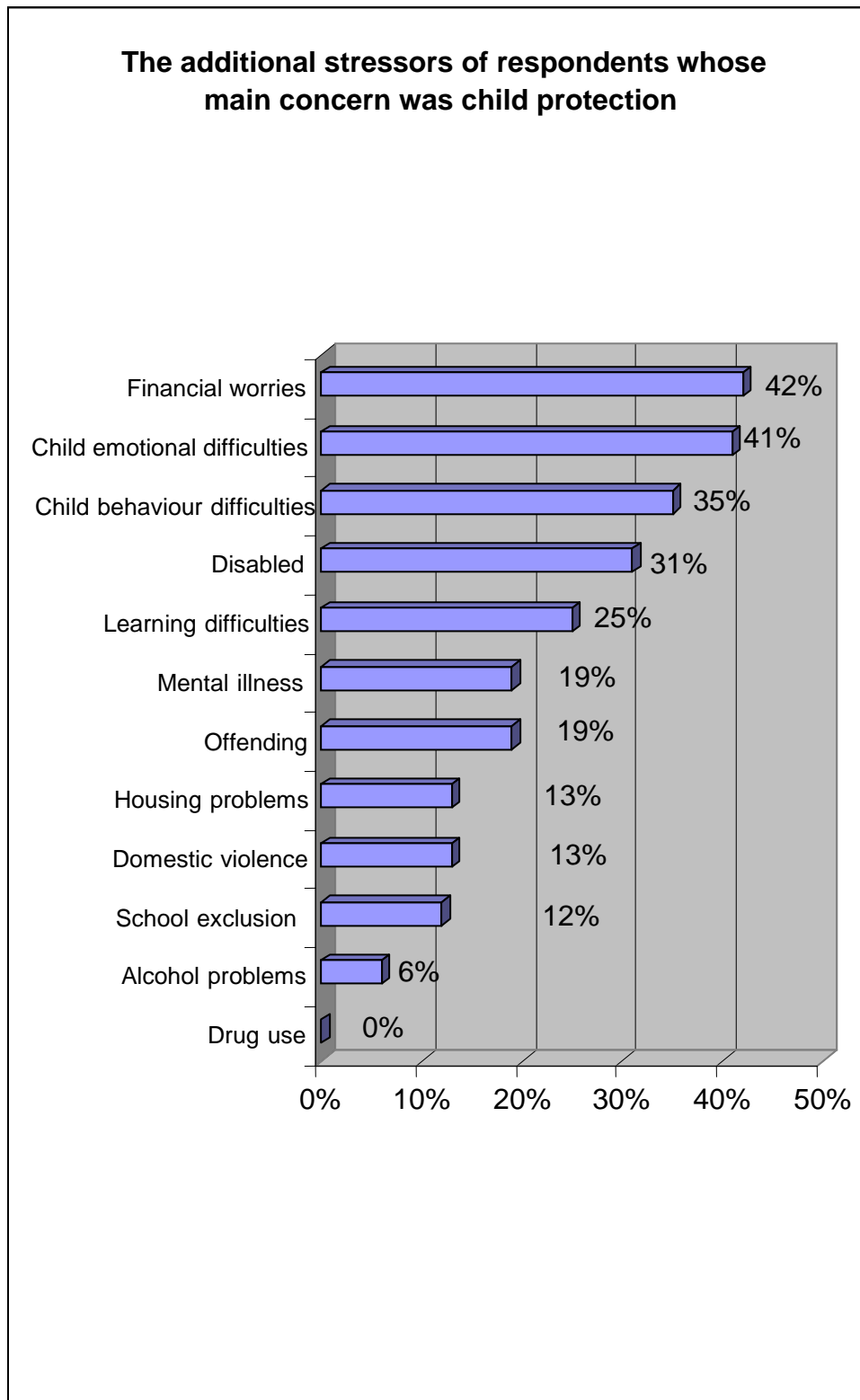
c) 'They took my baby when he was born. I was told I could have stitches and not see him or not have the stitches and see him. So I went to see him without having the stitches. They joked about it and said I could always have another one. But that's not right to treat someone like that. At the end of the day social services are punishing my children for something they haven't done. I passed out when they put my baby in my hands but they just took him and laughed at me. I was in agony because I then got an infection and I had to walk a long way to see my kids but I still did. They say I'm a bad mother but I'm not. They don't want to sit down with me because they think I'm only 22 and have no brain. I try to sit down and compromise with them but they just laugh at me.'

d) 'I'm not allowed to see them until they're 18. I haven't done anything. They don't listen to me and call me a liar.'

**Those whose main concern was child protection**

Amongst respondents whose main concern was child protection, 35% gave their household income as equivalent to professional, 18% as skilled, and 47% as unwaged. The majority (61%) were married or partnered with just under a third (31%) having GHQ bimodal scores of 4+, indicating substantial psychological distress. Just over half of these callers (53%) had three or more additional stressors in their lives.

Fig 2.2



Financial worries, children's emotional and behavioural difficulties, disability and mental illness were key features.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data suggested two main themes: (1) that social workers had not dealt with respondents appropriately (in their view), and (2) that respondents sought to understand the law, their position and how best to proceed.

**(1) In respondent's view, social workers had not dealt appropriately with the issues.**

Many of these callers expressed indignation and anger at the situation in which they found themselves:

a) 'My children are young carers because I suffer with chronic pain. . . Being put on a child protection plan was a slap in the face. They put it that it was the parents' fault but it's actually a loving family. We had two weekly visits from child protection and they were very aggressive – they said for example that my child's room looked like a slum. It just added pressure because of all the stipulations put on us. . . I was worried about my family as nothing was explained to them except the child protection plan. The kids didn't want to speak to child protection but they had to speak or it seemed like I was stopping them. We should have been handled more delicately by the child protection people. They said it was 'emotional abuse', which is a devastating label for a parent. I try my hardest. I was worried I'd lose my children. I attempted suicide. Yes, not ideal but I was dealing with so much. Family Rights Group helped. Before, I didn't have a clue'.

b) 'My son has emotional needs. He's always been difficult. Social services believe it's my fault, but I think it's as a result of early life. He needed therapy and now goes to a specialist school. I need social workers to take responsibility for him as he was adopted from care. The problems are from the past; that's why he needs therapy. . . Things are improving and I'm working with school and social

services, but I can't meet social services on my own. They're very judgemental and don't listen to me. Meetings are more stress for me. I'm going to them to be abused. They're a waste of time and a loss of income to me. They get paid, I don't. I've had to fight for help. I do my best to work with my son.'

c) 'Social services believe I've been emotionally abusing my son. He has a problem with soiling. There's no organic reason so social services think it's my fault. He is now with his Dad to see if he improves but I'm worried he'll end up in care or even adopted. Social workers are difficult and I'm terrified of them.'

d) 'Social services are bullies and very powerful. You have to do what they say. My son (prospective father) had to have tests and assessments. He was told the babies would be taken away if he didn't comply'.

e) 'I rang Family Rights Group because I wasn't getting anywhere with social services. Parents also need support. We felt we were being pushed – threatened – to put my son into care. It's a dire situation. We wanted to know our legal rights.'

f) 'Why did they blame us? Social; services made the wrong decisions.'

g) 'I was concerned because my wife was making false allegations against me and social services were saying the children wouldn't be able to see me. I'm terminally ill so this is obviously so important to me.'

These expressions of emotion, based as they are on self report, are not necessarily objective summations of the callers' circumstances. However, it may be of concern that partnership working, a cornerstone of social work training and guidance, appears to be failing some of the most vulnerable parents. Fifteen years after the publication of 'Child protection: Messages from research'

(Department of Health 1995), it is clear that some of its key findings are still not complied with, notably:

- 'professionals are far less concerned with the way families are left when the enquiry is complete and concerns subside than they are with the way children enter the protection process.' (p.39)
- 'As nearly all of the children remain at or return home, involving the family in the child protection process is likely to be effective. The research adds weight to this argument but finds that professionals could be doing more to achieve a partnership with both parents and, where appropriate, the child.' (p.39)
- 'A suspicion of child abuse has traumatic effects on families. Good professional practice can ease parents' anxiety and lead to co-operation that helps protect the child'. (p.44)

## **2) Callers who wanted to understand the law, their position, and how best to proceed**

As a result, many of these callers appeared to be desperately trying to acquire the knowledge that they felt they needed to -'fight' their case:

a)'Social services were concerned that my husband might be violent as he has mental health problems. The whole child protection procedure came out of the blue. I was worried about what might happen to my baby when it is born and I wanted to get advice on it.'

b) 'I didn't understand what was happening'



c) 'I wanted to know about what was going to happen at the child protection conference and was there anything I could do myself.'

d) 'I just wanted to get all the information I needed before the meeting so I was fully prepared'.

e) 'I felt I didn't get the support I needed from social services. I wanted an advocate but Family Rights Group gave me the confidence to do it myself.'

f) 'We just wanted to find out what social services can and can't do. We felt messed around by them.'

g) 'I had no preconceived ideas. I was willing to tap available resources. Family Rights Group helped within 24 hours. I wanted to know if I had any rights at all. They (FRG) sent me information so I knew where I stood at the next meeting.'

h) 'The child was sexually abused by her step father but there was not enough evidence. . . We needed help to get some closure for her. We wanted to know whether we could take a civil action against him and what the likely outcomes would be. I have no faith in social services. No-one was prepared to take a civil action. . . My granddaughter feels no-one believes her.'

i) 'I don't know how to go forward.'

j) 'I didn't know which way to turn'.

k) 'I wanted general advice about legal aspects of the case. I'd found out my 14 year old daughter was pregnant but social services didn't tell me and she had gone for a termination. . . I was upset that parents with parental responsibilities weren't consulted over something as important as that.'

l) 'I wanted clarification. I knew my rights from reading but I wanted to back that up and validate it with Family Rights Group's expertise. I was kept in the dark about the local authority's logic and I was worried.'

m) 'I can't understand the system and I want to know my rights'.

n) 'I just wanted to know what was likely to happen and what I should be doing'.

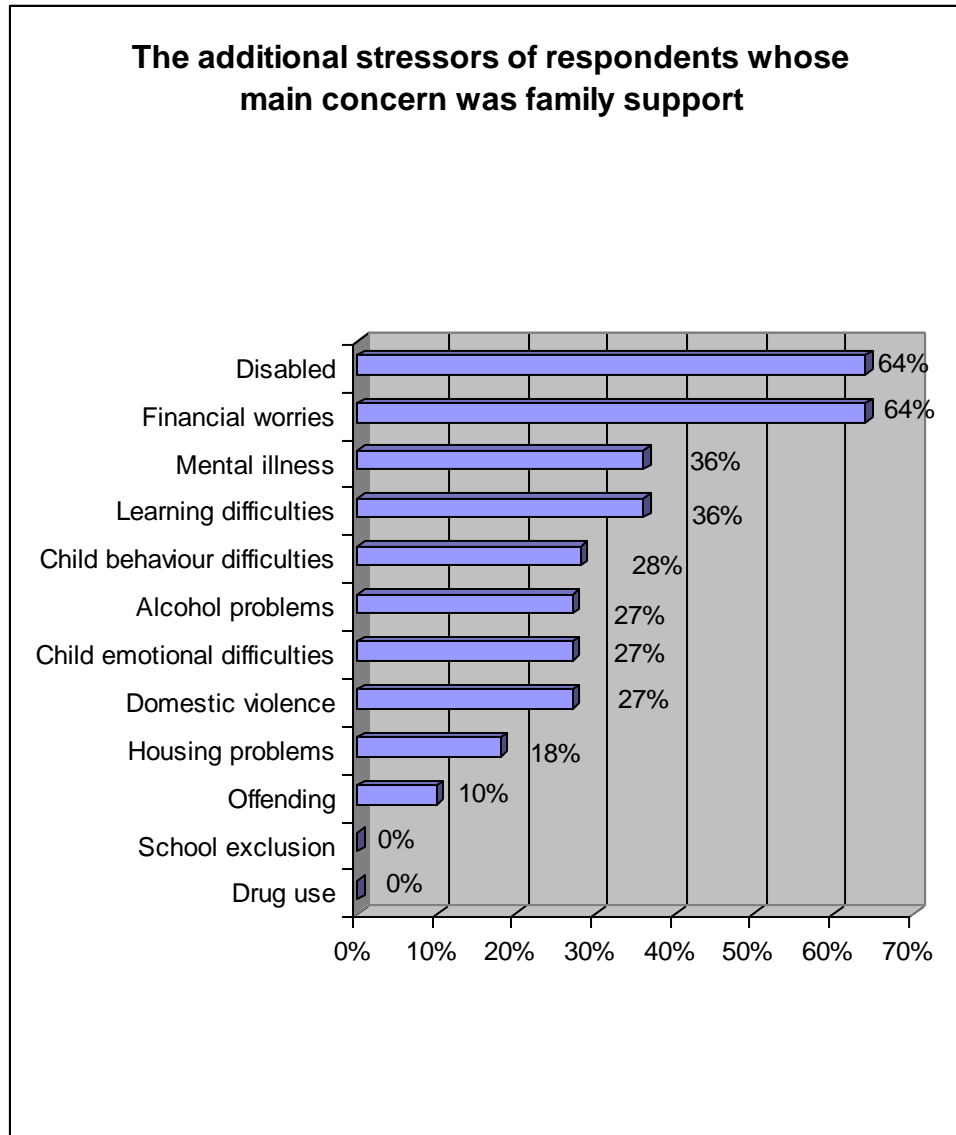
o) 'There was a child protection case conference coming up and I needed to know what I could do. Social workers are just going on hearsay not evidence'.

### **Those whose main concern was family support**

Of these respondents, only 9% reported incomes equivalent to that of a professional, none reported incomes equivalent to skilled workers, but 18% reported household incomes equivalent to those of unskilled workers and almost three-quarters (73%) reported being unwaged. Half of the respondents (50%) were married or partnered. This group reported the lowest proportion of respondents with abnormal psychological functioning, with only 27% having GHQ-12 bimodal scores of 4+, although this is still far above the average found in community samples (see Fig 1.4).

Just under half of these callers (46%) had three or more additional stressors.

### **Fig 2.3**



Of those wanting family support, 36% had one or more children with disabilities, and 27% were adults with disabilities. The overriding theme here was callers feeling let down by social services and wanting to know how to access the support they needed:

a) 'I've got two disabled children – autism is part of the diagnosis too. . . Social services directed me to charities to get help, but both of my children are over five. People tell me to try Sure Start, HomeStart or Children's Centres but they're no good for older children who are disabled. Social Services rely on agencies to

take over their cases but once children are over five, they're left on their own. . . . It's a parent's right to ask for an assessment but if you ask for help you are treated as though you are out of order. When you phone up, it's like, 'Oh no, it's not her again', but Family Rights Group were very helpful. . . I can't get any help from social services. If you report a complaint about a child in danger, social services know what to do but if you report a child in need or a young carer or parents needing support because they're coming out of hospital, no support is forthcoming. If you tell any social worker about a child in danger, they all know what to do, but they don't know what to do in any other situation. It depends on whether the social worker has had personal experience of it or whether they're supervised properly.'

b) A father: 'Their mother is an alcoholic so I'm caring for six children but I don't have the financial back-up. I think the benefit system absolutely sucks to be honest. The transition between my ex-wife and me having the benefits meant I'm in financial trouble. I haven't seen a penny since January (six months previously) and I'm in debt. I've had a £1,500 crisis loan and I'm maxed out, and no doubt this isn't an isolated incident. . . My son has had four social workers this year, and he hasn't seen one of them.'

c) A godmother: 'I was looking for an advocacy to support my friend in dealing with social services. The mother of the young boy feels intimidated and scared of social services so I contacted Family Rights Group to try and find an advocate to support the mother. She has mental health issues and her son is disabled.'

d) 'No-one was accepting responsibility for our case . . . Social services were horrible to us and I felt like I was up against a brick wall.'

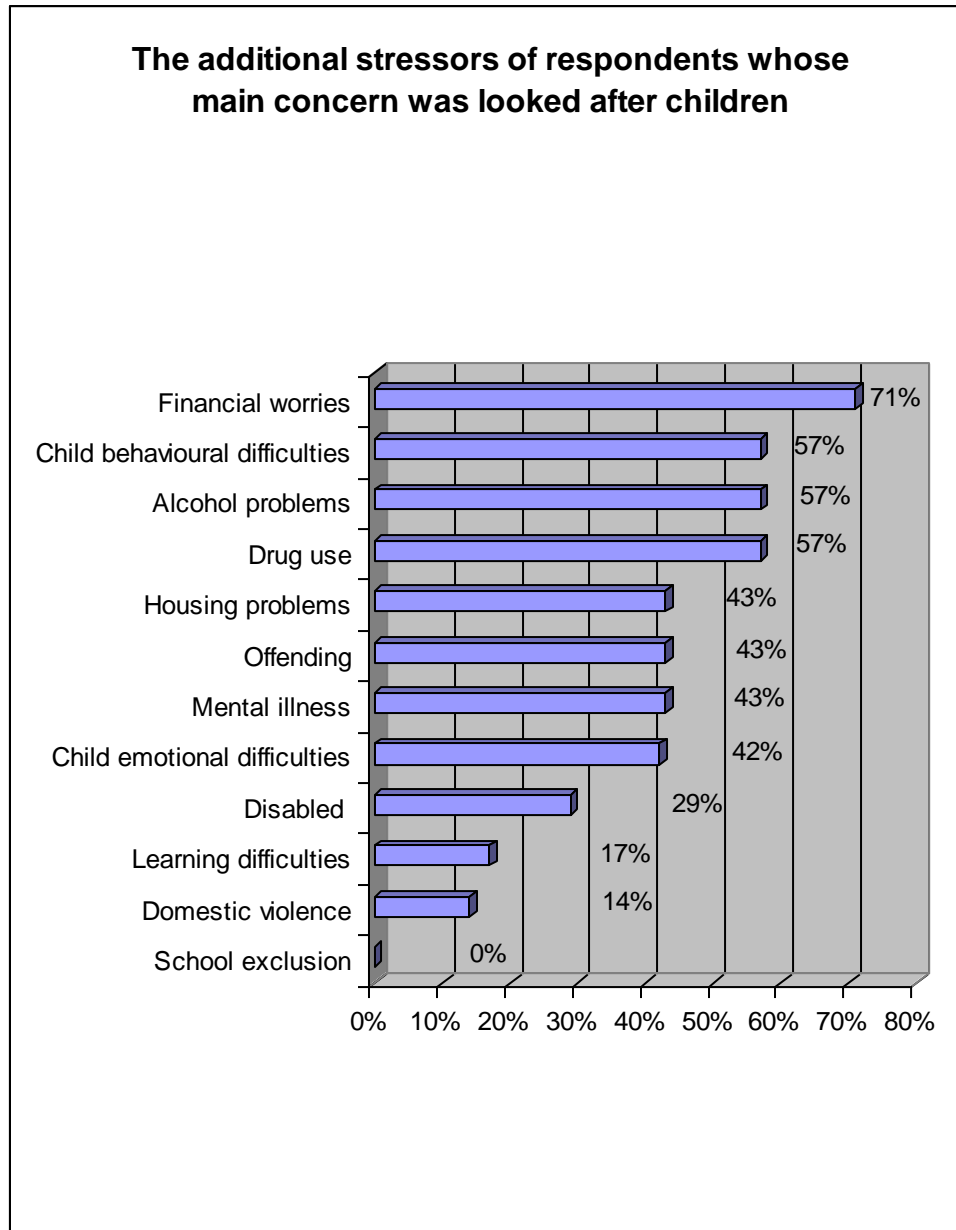
e) 'We wanted to know what rights we had to respite care (for child) and how far social services could push us.'

**Those whose main concern was 'Looked After Children'**

Although these callers were 'logged' as being involved with looked after children, it was apparent that many were involved in informal arrangements with the local authority. All of the callers were either parents or grandparents. The majority of them (71%) were grandparents, with 29% being parents. About three-quarters of them were married or partnered (71%), with only 14% from household incomes equivalent to those of professionals, 14% from skilled households and the vast majority, 72% from unwaged households (largely on state pensions).

Half of these callers (50%) had GHQ-12 bimodal scores of 4+, indicating a high level of psychological distress.

**Fig 2.4**



Where respondents elaborated on problems, it was clear that the high proportion of drug and alcohol use was largely accounted for by the views of grandparents in relation to the parents of their grandchildren. Again, however, a very high proportion of those involved with looked after children – 71% - had three or more additional stressors in their lives. This group were also older, with almost three-quarters of them being aged over 50.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data suggested that for grandparents, the overriding sense was one of lack of support, especially financial support, and a desire for clarity about the implications of the arrangements suggested to them by social services, such as Residence Orders, which was compounded by their sense that social services were not 'straight' with them. Parents, on the other hand, tended to want to know what they could do to improve their situation.

**1) Grandparents whose main concern was lack of financial support, and lack of clarity as to their rights and legal options.**

The quotations below illustrate the very real difficulties many of these carers faced:

a) 'I've got care of two children under section 20. I don't know anything about their legal status or rights. When the children came to me we lived on my savings as a pensioner for six weeks. I didn't have a clue about the fostering rules, allowances or the support available. I didn't understand the law or the system. There were loads of meetings. New people kept popping up. I had to jump through the hoops but I didn't know what the reasons were. I tried the social workers but they're not usually accurate and have their own agenda. I needed impartial information. Social workers kept using jargon like 'SGOs' and 'RO', and there was pressure to get me off the books.'

b) A Step-grandfather: 'They (social services) needed a home for her and social services gave us 10 minutes to decide. My partner (child's grandmother) was very emotional despite the impracticalities of the plan. I rang Family Rights Group to find out what our legal position was. Social services gave us 10 minutes to take her. . . Nothing was explained to us and they offered very little allowances. She is a needy child and we could not do it. We felt threatened and bullied as social services implied that if we asked for financial help they would remove the child and that she would go into care if we hadn't taken her. She was 'landed on us' with no support from the local authority.'

c) 'Social services asked us to have the child . . . We have had no financial help whatsoever, and now after two years, they're offering after school club once a week. We were asking to be assessed as a foster carer but they say, 'No' as the child is not in care. . . I'm a pensioner and can't afford it, but earn too much for means testing. But what happens when my husband retires? Social Services also said I had to supervise the contact with the child's dad, but it's bad for family relationships. I'm 66. I can do without all this.'

d) 'It's all about ego. A team won't admit that they made a mistake. They placed the child with us, but won't admit this was not a private arrangement. We needed support and there were contact issues, but the social workers kept fobbing us off . . . not doing their job. The child was referred to CAMHS<sup>3</sup> but it took years to get help. We also had financial problems. We were up to our eyes in debt at the time, but our income looked good on paper. We couldn't get legal aid but we genuinely couldn't afford to pay for legal advice. That's why I rang Family Rights Group. I've spent time on the web – and I found out about Residence Orders and allowances. I was appalled at the disparity between individuals. I realized there were different orders and I wanted to know whether we should be foster parents - advantages and disadvantages. . We were disadvantaged as we look middle class. We should be treated with respect but it did not happen. Finally we did get legal aid so we instructed a solicitor/barrister and it went much better.'

e) 'I'm 70. I'm not working. If I was working J wouldn't mind but I can't have full responsibility - what happens when he's 16? They should help me to look after him, like give me respite care, but they said 'No, once you take him, that's it', but with no help I can't. I have children and grandchildren who I look after in the day, I can't look after more. But the boy wanted to live with me. . . I was spending my pension money to buy him a bed and school uniform and no one would help. . . I

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<sup>3</sup> Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service



wanted to ring Family Rights Group to know what I was entitled to and also as my house is worth money I'm not entitled to legal aid.'

## **2) Parents who wanted to know what they could do to improve their situation**

These parents wanted advice and support:

a) 'My partner and I had a few bust ups so the police were called. If the police are called three times in a year you get called up for it. I wanted to know about foster care arrangements, time-scales etc and how to get the children back'.

b) 'I needed advice on our legal situation and the intricacies of the law'

c) 'My son lives with me but my daughter ran away and is now in care. She was involved in alcohol and drugs and through this was also involved with the police. I was trying to get to get advice on how to deal with it. I was obviously very worried as a single father.'

In this sample, however, the main concern was clearly the lack of support made available to grandparents. Under s.23 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority is under a duty to make arrangements to enable a child to live with extended family or family friends 'unless that would not be reasonably practicable or consistent with his welfare.'

According to the Department for Children, Schools and Families, about 12% of all looked after children are currently placed with family and friends; a relatively small percentage given the legislation. However, the Department also notes that:

'There is a much broader group of children in family and friends care who do not have looked after status (i.e. are not the subject of care orders or interim care orders, or have been provided by the local authority with accommodation under

section 20 of the Children Act 1989). They may be receiving support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 or they may not be in touch with services, for example, where there is a private arrangement with the birth parent(s). As many arrangements are made privately, no definitive figures of the numbers of children cared for by family and friends' exist, but, for example, the current estimate is that there are approximately 200,000 grandparents raising grandchildren.'<sup>4</sup>

Research (Farmer and Moyers 2005, 2008; DCSF 2007) suggests that outcomes for children placed in family/friends care are as good and sometimes better than for children placed in stranger foster care. These children are also enabled to maintain contact with their wider family, to consolidate their cultural identity and to maintain school and social networks. Family/friends care also provides a more stable environment, in which children 'feel loved, report high levels of satisfaction, appear to be as safe and their behaviour is perceived to be less of a problem' (DCSF 2007). The previous Labour Government amended and strengthened support for this group to some extent, but it remains the case that local authorities can determine the extent of any support under s.17 of the Children Act 1989, as well as eligibility. It may be appropriate therefore to consider whether all children not in the care of their parents should not automatically become 'children in need', and therefore eligible for an assessment of their needs..

The Munby judgment of September 2001 requiring local authorities to pay equivalent fostering allowances to all approved foster carers, whether or not they are family/friends carers, may in reality have the opposite result to that intended, namely that local authorities may avoid formalizing foster care arrangements. It is to be hoped that the new Guidance will ensure that where appropriate, support is available to family/friends carers regardless of their formal or informal status. Moreover, the criteria for support should be equitable regardless of legal status,

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<sup>4</sup> DCSF (2007) Children and Young Persons Bill Policy Paper: Family & Friends (Kinship) Care. London: TSO

and transparent. Given that Hunt (2008) found that some disrupted placements could have been prevented with better support, this is key. Whilst new Guidance is pending, it is also hoped that it will make clear to social work practitioners the importance of ensuring that there is informed consent to private or other 'fostering' arrangements. In this sample it was clear that many grandparents did not understand their position, the advantages or disadvantages of Residence or Special Guardianship Orders, or what they had apparently agreed to. With regard to the latter, there may also be pressure from the local authority for family/friends carers to assume more formal responsibility for the child through Residence or Special Guardianship Orders, without a full explanation of the financial implications (local authority discretionary support only) of any change in status. In this sample, grandparents clearly felt unsupported, stressed and unclear as to how best to proceed.

### **Those whose main concern was adoption**

Only 4% (N=2) of the sample had called about adoption-related issues. One wished to make a complaint following lack of support post-adoption, and the other, a mother and care leaver, was desperately trying to stop adoption proceedings. Her insight as a care leaver aged 22, with an older child aged three already in care, whilst not representative in such a small sample, may nevertheless be of interest.

'I've been in and out of care all my life. I've had a problematic past but I've got over it . . . Social workers should help families instead of taking children away. I didn't have a clue when I came out of care and I was a first time mother. If they taught you things like parenting I wouldn't have had all this hassle. They should help families to stay together not separate them and the only way they can do that is to help parents to understand what children need. They try to say I don't know how to meet my child's needs but I do and I have proof of that. They're on about physical and mental harm, but they should take a good look at themselves. They're doing both of those things and they're destroying my kids. That's what

they're doing. There should be more helpers and support. There should be groups out there for first time mothers out of care and before they have a child, they should be able to sit down together with other new mums to learn about the child's emotional and physical needs. It would be much better all round. . . I'm still trying to take them back because they've taken them for nothing. Social Services have taken the children from me. I understand their concerns, but I've separated from the father. . . The social worker says she has the kids now and she can do whatever she likes. That's how they talk to me. They want to put them up for adoption in August. The foster carer says I should have had my children back a long time ago. She's rung me and explained that to me. The foster carer said my little girl wanted her mum and that made me feel awful. She's (foster carer) not allowed to ring me but she does and she told me that there are a lot of meetings with social services behind my back, and she thinks it's wrong. Even though I still have parental rights they don't take that into consideration. . . I know what I want for the future and I'm going for it (to get children back) . . . I wanted to know whether I could get legal aid to take the case back to court to revoke the adoption order. I've got a good case. I've got a new partner, in a stable relationship and I'm about to start work as a volunteer.'

Apart from the importance for this young woman of Family Rights Group's advice, her comments on her own lack of insight into good parenting are important. Twenty years ago, Rutter (1989) pointed out that care leavers are particularly vulnerable as parents, because they lack good parental role models and because of the abuse, low self esteem and other deficits that are associated with deprived childhoods. It may then be important to ensure that young people in care are given appropriate teaching and support, both in care and as young parents, to enable them to cope well with their own children.

## Key Findings

- Those involved with looked after children, and specifically grandparents, had the highest levels of psychological disturbance and abnormal functioning, with 50% having scores of 4+ using GHQ-12 bimodal scoring.
- This group were also the most likely to be unwaged, and at 71% had the highest proportion of callers with three or more additional stressors.
- Grandparents' ability to promote the welfare of the child may be being compromised by lack of information and both practical and financial support.
- Children who cannot live with their parents appear to be at risk of poor outcomes through lack of statutory support. Grandparents who looked after children felt financially and practically unsupported, unsure of their rights or legal position, and let down by social services. Yet this group of carers is key in ensuring good outcomes for children who cannot live with their parents.
- Those involved in care proceedings were the second most vulnerable group, with 42% having abnormal levels of psychological functioning, and 67% experiencing three or more additional stressors.
- Those involved in care proceedings tended not to understand their situation, to feel a sense of injustice, to want to know how to acquire contact or the return of a child. Grandparents felt ill-informed and sometimes overlooked as potential carers.

- There may be a gap in social work training which consequently leaves the most vulnerable parents and grandparents desperately searching for advice.
- The overriding theme amongst those wanting family support was callers feeling let down by social services and wanting to know how to access the support they needed.
- Those seeking family support were far more likely to have financial problems or to be disabled or have disabled children.
- Amongst those involved with child protection, there tended to be a feeling that social workers had not understood their needs. Many also wanted knowledge of their legal and human rights.
- It may be important to ensure that young people in care are given appropriate teaching in child development and parenting skills as well as follow-up support, both in care and as young parents, to enable them to cope well with their own children, and to avoid the need for intergenerational care proceedings.

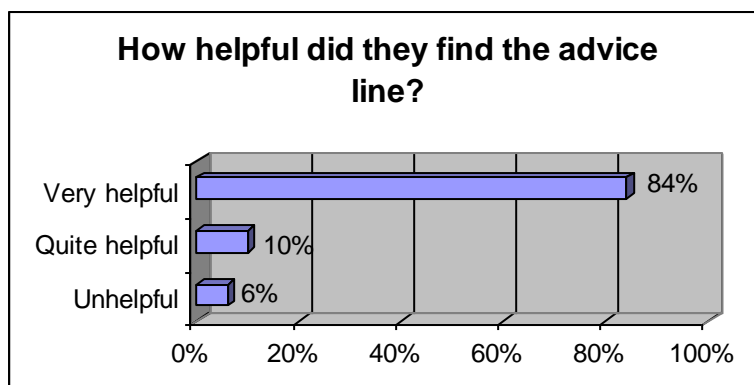
## CHAPTER 3

### WHAT DID CALLERS THINK OF THE ADVICE LINE AND SUPPORT?

#### How helpful was the advice line?

The overwhelming majority of callers found the advice line 'very helpful', with only three callers finding it unhelpful.

**Fig 3.1**



Only three respondents found it unhelpful: one said that her situation was too complex for anyone, one gave no reason, and the third was referred back to her social worker, which she found unhelpful.

#### Why do callers find the advice line so helpful?

Thematic analysis showed five clear themes: firstly the lack of other sources of advice on these issues; secondly the specialist nature and capacity of the advice line, thirdly, its independence, fourthly the importance of being listened to, and lastly, the value of being given clear, knowledgeable and appropriate information. Further details are given below.

#### **1) Advice line seen as sole source of specialist legal advice for these families**

The vast majority of respondents (92%) had contacted other agencies for help with only partial or no success, suggesting that there is a paucity of specialised support in this area:

- a) 'I tried the CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) but they weren't sufficiently knowledgeable. The social worker advised me to contact Family Rights Group.'
- b) 'I contacted the Catholic Children's Refuge Society and the church. They didn't seem to have the right info.'
- c) 'We tried the Citizens Advice Bureau but they weren't very helpful. The social worker didn't know either.'
- d) 'Citizens Advice Bureau, but they didn't have any answers'.
- d) 'I did make an appointment with a solicitor but the solicitor cancelled.'
- e) 'I didn't know where to start, but we got a solicitor but only for a few hours as I can't afford it.'
- f) 'We tried After Adoption (an adoption agency) but it couldn't help.'
- g) 'I tried solicitors and the web but I didn't find any of them much use.'

Linked to this, thematic analysis showed that respondents valued the advice line's expertise, which these respondents had not found anywhere else:

## **2) The specialist nature and capacity of the advice line**

In this, Family Rights Group appears to hold a niche position:



- a) 'There are other help lines but in terms of what social services do there's no other advice line I know of that can help you . . . or who are as clued up about disabled children and their rights. It really helped to know what my rights under the law were and the sections of the Act. I was then able to ask for appropriate help properly and to express myself properly in their (social workers') own language. It was very helpful.'
  
- b) 'Unlike CAB you can get through to Family Rights Group and the people there are competent and give good advice.'
  
- c) 'It was important I spoke to someone with knowledge of family rights and experience of the problems that families have'
  
- d) 'She understood and she also had expertise in care proceedings'
  
- e) 'They are specialists'.
  
- f) 'The most information I ever got was from Family Rights Group. The lady was very helpful.'
  
- g) 'They're a lot more knowledgeable than other organisations'.
  
- h) 'I needed proper legal advice and that's what I got'.
  
- i) 'Apart from legal help, and I don't qualify for legal aid because I work full time, there doesn't seem to be anything that sees things from the parent's point of view or looks at things holistically. Unlike the local authority, Family Rights Group were more balanced, they weren't motivated by targets or inspections'.

### **3) The value of independence**

Respondents, many of whom were struggling to understand their rights or legal position, and who were often frustrated with their local authority's style of service delivery, clearly valued an independent advice line:

a) 'I think it's easier to talk to someone who is not directly involved, someone who is impartial and if you make mistakes you don't get judged.'

b) 'I wish I had known about them from the start as they would have helped then. They are impartial.'

c) 'They give impartial and factual information'

d) 'They're impartial, gave brilliant advice, consistent, really supportive and understood the issues.'

e) 'Social services are bullying and intimidating all the time and you can talk to someone on the advice line without feeling intimidated and it helps a lot.'

f) 'They are impartial and very knowledgeable'

g) 'They're they only people I could trust to be impartial.'

h) 'They gave impartial, clear and factual advice and helped me to clean my mind and make informed decisions. They were brilliant and I felt reassured.'

### **4) The value of being listened to**

From the responses given, it is clear that callers value being listened to and feeling supported:

- a) 'They're good at listening and giving CLEAR (callers' emphasis) answers; clear and concise. . . They give you the time you need - excellent.'
- b) 'It was somebody that was actually listening to ME (caller's emphasis). Everyone else like social services were just concerned with the rights of the child and not us as parents. Family Rights Group do. It helped me when I was very, very down in the dumps and didn't have anyone else to turn to.'
- c) 'I wanted help with everything when I rang Family Rights Group. When I sit down and explain things to the solicitor he talks over me and he doesn't listen to me. In fact his eyes are rolling in the back of his head. . . Family Rights Group didn't turn me away, whereas everyone else has'.
- d) 'They seemed to have the time. For example, they called me back, answered every question far better than anyone else.'
- e) 'The people on the end of the phone were extremely helpful. The first thing is they LISTEN (caller's emphasis). They didn't rush me, they let me talk and then said what was available.'
- f) 'They spent the time to make sure I understood the issues properly. Couldn't be more praising of Family Rights Group.'
- g) 'They take extra time to listen to your problems. Obviously they can't tell you what to do, but they give you your options and they listen to you'

##### **5) The value of clear, knowledgeable and appropriate information**

As we have seen, just over a third of these callers (Fig 1.4) were suffering from high levels of psychological distress, were facing substantial difficulty in relation

to their children or grandchildren, and were seeking the support that they had not found from their local authority. It is important that Family Rights Group advice line should be seen as accessible, knowledgeable, clear and supportive in order both to engage these callers, and – to be effective - to help them to resolve their problems in partnership with their local authorities, where appropriate.

As identified in the earlier comments relating to the specialist nature of the advice offered, it is clear that callers valued the knowledge base, clarity and support offered by advisors:

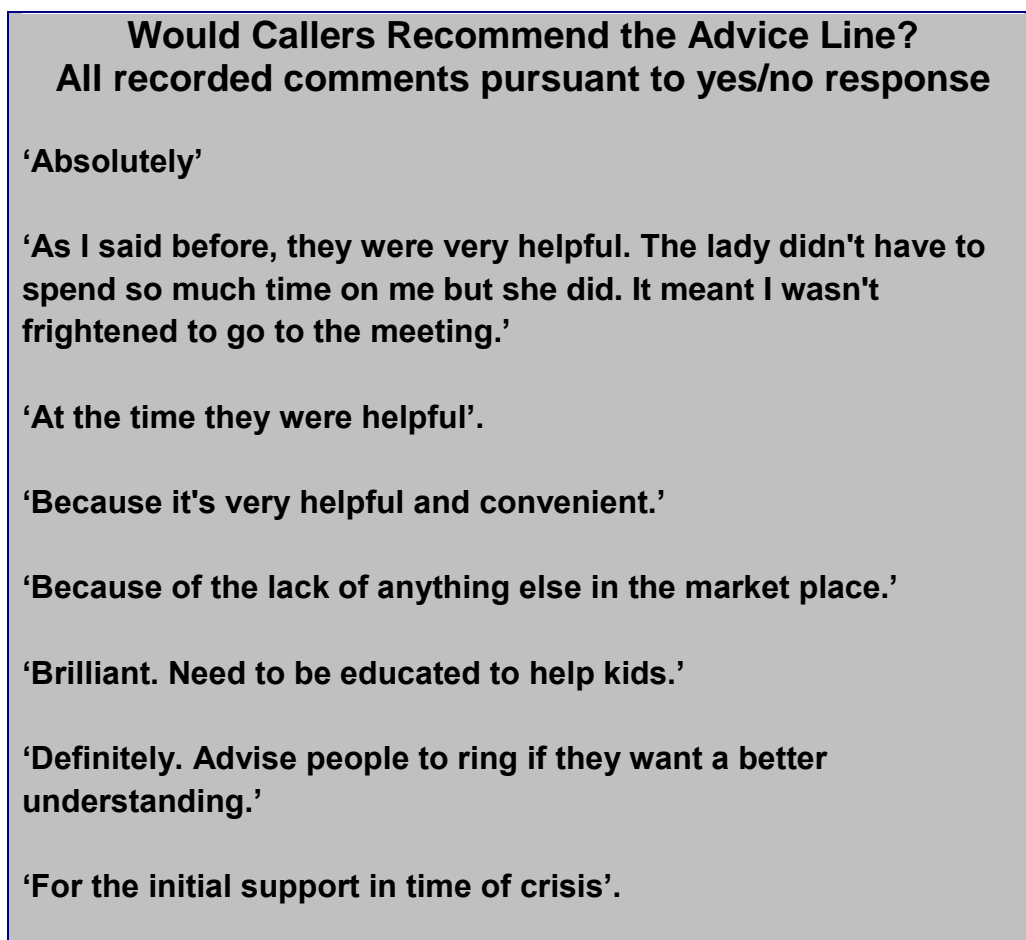
- a) 'Wonderful lady from Family Rights Group. Wealth of knowledge'
- b) 'They give accurate and comprehensive information'.
- c) 'She understood and she also had expertise in care proceedings'.
- d) 'They make you understand more of what's happening. They opened my eyes. I got a lot of information and a lot off my chest.'
- e) 'They are very quick at answering the phone, clear with their advice and if you have any other concerns they point you in the right direction.'
- f) 'You can speak to someone who knows what they are talking about'.
- g) 'The advisers on the line are great, extremely helpful.'
- h) 'The most information I ever got was from Family Rights Group. The lady was very helpful.'
- i) 'They are the best hands on advice;'

j) 'They're very approachable. You don't feel as though it's a legal body. It's friendly advice, not someone in a shirt and tie. Not legal jargon, understandable.'

### **How important is the advice line?**

Callers were asked how important they felt the advice line to be, and perhaps not surprisingly, given the above, 92% felt it to be very important, and the remaining 8% felt it to be quite important. Moreover, with only one exception where the caller was unsure, all callers would recommend the Family Rights Group advice line to others. Whilst not all callers wanted to elaborate on why they would recommend it, of those who did – whether positive or negative - their comments in full are recorded below.

**Fig 3.2**



**'Family Rights Group told me I could revoke the adoption order and I didn't know anything about that before. My solicitors never told me but Family Rights Group told me. I've found out that social services haven't followed procedures properly so that's good for my case. Family Rights Group told me information that I didn't have a clue about. The solicitors should have told me that information. Some people just don't give you the information you need.'**

**'Good to have a third party not emotionally involved, impartial, friendly and emotional.'**

**'Great advisors on the phone'.**

**'Helped to find solutions to our concerns.'**

**'It was important I spoke to someone with knowledge of family rights and experience of the problems that families have and able to tell me what I am supposed to do with regard to social services. Many people aren't sure what social workers are supposed to do and not supposed to do, and when it's appropriate to ask for support. There are other helplines but in terms of what social services do there's no other advice line I know of that can help you with that or who are as clued up about disabled children and their rights.'**

**'I'd recommend it to anyone going through hell. It gave me answers to questions that social services couldn't give me.'**

**'I've recommended it to my mum and friends, as no-one knows their rights.'**

**'I've recommended them already. They're clear and impartial. If you want general info about local authority procedures or Court proceedings it's your starting point. Everything is in one place and the website is also easy to navigate. '**

**'Impartial help and advice. I really do mean that. Without the help we got we would have been in crisis. It helped us immensely to be able to sit down and read it.'**

**'In these situations the law is clear but you have to know what your rights are.'**

**'It helped me when I was really down, to pick me up.'**

**'It helped us lots.'**

**'It was helpful.'**

**'It would depend on their situation,'**

**'It's knowledgeable and independent.'**

**'Social workers have a lot of power behind them, i didn't know WHAT i could do legally and was getting very frustrated. I couldn't afford a solicitor, if I had contacted Family Rights Group earlier maybe this wouldn't have happened.'**

**'The information put my mind at rest. A little bit of knowledge is better than no knowledge. I needed information straight away, found you guys (FRG), spoke to the lady, had a pack in the post. It was like step 1 if you see what i mean.'**

**'The information they give is so useful to someone in a very bad situation.'**

**'There are not really many places you can get the information and speak to someone who knows exactly what happens and what you can do.'**

**'To get a clear answer'**

**'Very helpful and helps you understand what your rights are Very helpful to people in similar circumstances.'**

**'Very very helpful. Didn't matter how long you were on the phone. They knew what they were talking about.'**

**'Yes, for other people but it didn't help me.'**

**'Yes, it would be great if the Government helped Family Rights Group to do a little more for the family. I would recommend it because it gives you knowledge and what you can do and where you can go.'**

**'They can listen, help and make people feel at ease. They give good advice and if they can't help, they give numbers of people who can help. I've passed their number onto others already.'**

### **Signposting and Advice Sheets**

In just over a third of cases (37%) other agencies or avenues were suggested to callers and of these, 78% found the signposting helpful. From time to time advisers also send callers advice sheets which describe in more detail the legal and other issues involved in particular circumstances. These advice sheets are also available to download from their website. Two thirds of the sample (66%) received advice sheets from Family Rights Group, and of these, 98% found them helpful. The advice sheets cover a wide range of topics from care proceedings to Special Guardianship and family support. Typical comments of those who found them helpful included:

'I wanted to make a complaint to social services and to know my rights, because I have two disabled teenagers who need help and I'm their sole carer. People panic when you complain because they get scrutinised, so Family Rights Group's advice sheets were very helpful.'

'The leaflets really helped me to say, "Right, I'll do something myself".'

'The advice sheet put you on the right track, because you know more'.

'The advice sheets meant i understood the purpose of the various meetings and assessments etc'.



'They gave me factual information.'

It's important to be able to get the best out your solicitor and to show you have a basic understanding of the issues . . . The info has been brilliant and the handouts are very useful. I've printed them off and I keep them in my folder and if I don't understand anything like court reports, or Special Guardianships, I just look it up in my folder.'

### **Advice sheet use in meetings**

In addition, 50% also found the advice sheets helpful to use in meetings with social workers and other professionals:

'I took all the fact sheets with me to the meetings. It gave me confidence.'

'I took them with me to the meeting'.

'I went through them and highlighted the bits I needed'.

'I made meticulous notes and managed through using the legal language from the advice sheets to convey them'.

'They helped us at meetings because then we could say, 'Well we know this, we've got this'.'

'We were able to say what we wanted to happen'

'YES (caller's emphasis), I was able to stand up for the rights of my children.'

**Those in receipt of letters before proceedings**

A minority of callers (6%) recalled receiving specific advice from Family Rights Group, related to being in receipt of a 'letter before proceedings' from the local authority. All of these callers said that the help that they had received from Family Rights Group made a difference.

'It was a big help.'

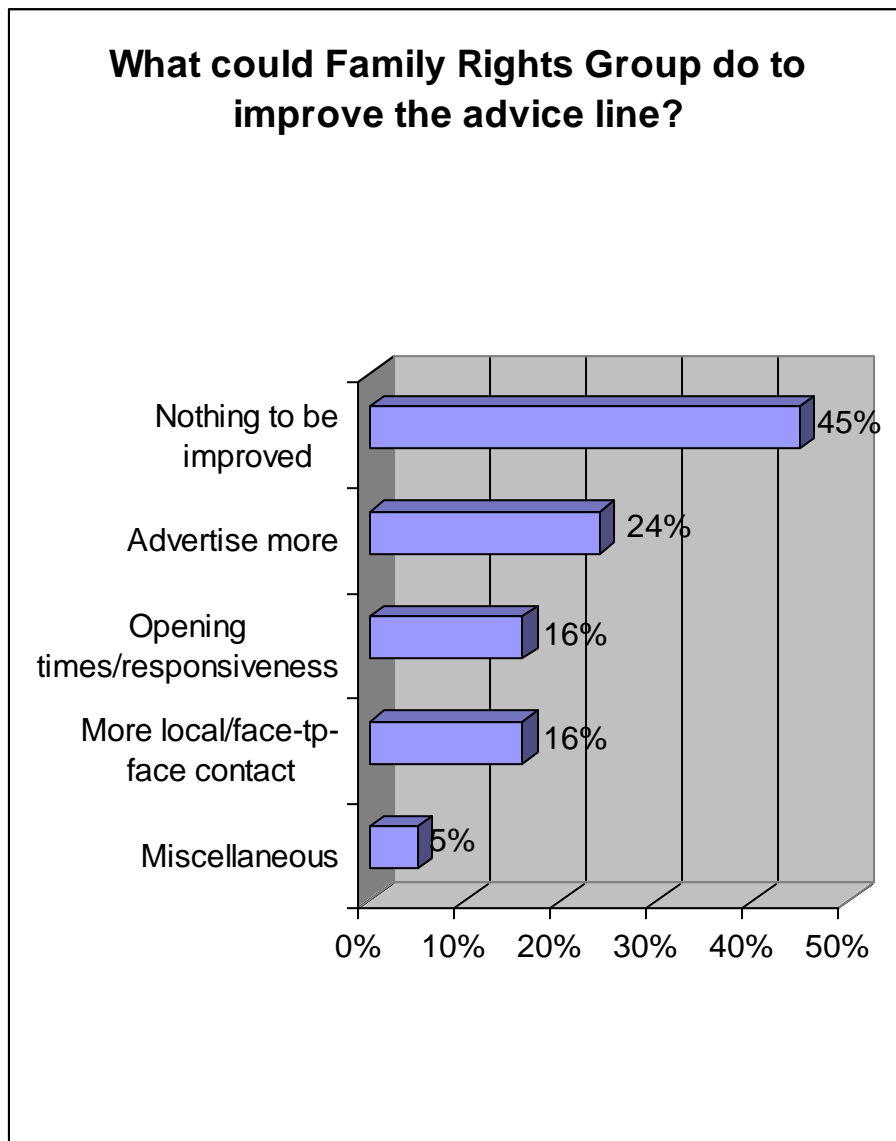
'The advice was very clear and helpful. I knew what to do straight away. It clarified the issues for me. . . Without it I wouldn't have got legal advice or been able to help my daughter to get legal advice.'

'Made things an awful lot clearer and helpful'

**How could the advice line be improved?**

Callers were also asked whether they had any suggestions for improving the advice line. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data showed that the most important theme was that the line could not be improved, followed by the need for Family Rights Group to advertise more widely, and a desire for face-to-face provision and longer opening hours (including evenings).

Fig 3.3



NB: Some callers raised more than one point

### **Not in need of improvement**

Many respondents were clear that the advice line could not be improved:

a) 'Absolutely nothing. I was sent away from Family Rights Group with information. I took the relevant bits and these relevant bits were worth their weight in gold and put my mind to rest. I don't have all the answers but knowledge is such a powerful thing.'

- b) 'To be honest nothing. The service was brilliant.'
- c) 'You can't improve it any more. It's very good.'
- d) 'It's an excellent service. Can't think of anything.'
- e) 'No, couldn't have got better. Very quick, over an hour on the phone, letters arrived in the post immediately. The Family Rights Group lady was worried the information wouldn't arrive in time for my meeting so she spent an hour on the phone going through it. Excellent.'
- f) 'Nothing.'
- g) 'No, it can't be improved but it just didn't fulfil our needs'.
- h) 'The adviser went BEYOND (caller's emphasis) a work role. She gave extra, gave solutions eg 'Have you tried this?' I'd give them 110%, excellent.'
- i) 'I can't think of anything.'
- j) 'I don't think it could be improved unless it was tailored to every complex family situation.'
- k) 'Nothing, they are doing their job very well.'
- l) 'I got all the help and advice I needed. Its good to have the leaflets. Family Rights Group are outsiders – they're able to give legal advice, and impartial advice. They are very knowledgeable.'

m) 'I got what i asked for - the two women were very helpful. They seemed to know what to ask even though I didn't know what questions to ask them. So I would say no changes; it was brilliant.'

n) 'It is perfect as it is.'

o) 'Nothing to improve '

p) 'Nothing!'

### **The need to advertise more widely**

About a quarter of respondents said that Family Rights Group should advertise more widely:

'Advertise it more, I'd never heard of it so advertise it wider.'

'I know of Family Rights Group because I've got disabled children and I'm involved a lot with parents with disabilities but other parents wouldn't know about it. If Family Rights Group's number was advertised in children's centres, schools and social services offices it would be helpful.'

'Make it more widespread, so more people know about the service they offer to help more people in my situation.'

More advertising so people could know about it earlier. If I'd known about Family Rights Group early it wouldn't have got this far.'

'I think parents especially single parents need to be able to find Family Rights Group quicker. It would be great if they were more visible. Maybe hook up with other organisations like Parentline - appear on their website.'

'Just knowing about it before or earlier would have helped.'

'Make it more widespread so more people know about it'

'It needs to be more widely advertised'.

'The quality of the information is very good. They need to advertise better. Kinship care needs to be better known about too with more articles in the press/Big Issue etc.'

### **A desire for more face-to-face or local provision**

A relatively small proportion (16%) would have liked face-to-face support:

'The time on the phone is quite limited - is there any face-to-face support?'

'I would have liked a face-to-face interview'.

'I would have liked a local line or office. I would rather see someone than use the phone. I had to phone London from Southport.'

'It would have been nice to talk face to face as I'm not very good on the telephone. The web page is very good.'

'Sometimes it might help to see someone'.

'I'd have liked more one-to-one discussions. It would be nice to see someone face to face.'

### **A need for longer and more flexible opening times for the advice line, with the possibility of more staffing**

Again, the same proportion (16%) would have liked more flexible opening times to help those who work and who cannot therefore make such calls during the daytime, or those with children in the house during waking hours:

'I liked the interactiveness of it and the fact that they can call you back, but opening hours are quite limited.'

'Opening times are a bit restrictive. It'd be nice to have an out of hours advice line. They're only open a few hours a day but if they could work 9 to 5 and one evening a week from 8 to 9, that would be helpful.'

'Sometimes I might need an urgent response. The website was helpful.'

'If the advice line was open in the evenings it would be helpful because working parents might not be able to use a confidential line in the daytime or at work'.

'It's understaffed. They need to speed up the response.'

'It takes ages to get through. They need more people. It's lucky if you get through at all - like a lottery.'

### **Miscellaneous**

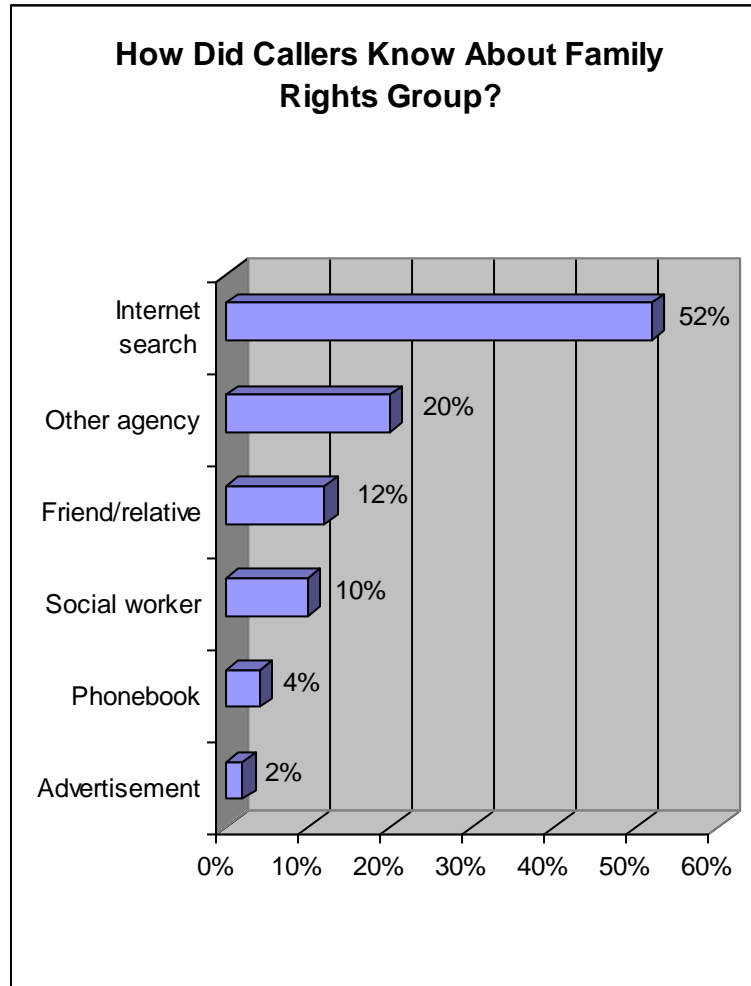
'Good but there's a lot of information on the website which could be more bite size. Small font - could be bigger than that. Not a criticism just a suggestion.'

'I had a big problem with language and the system is difficult to understand. It would be useful if they had the advice sheets in Urdu.'

### How did callers know about Family Rights Group?

Callers were asked how they had found out about the advice line. Their responses show that just over half had found Family Rights Group via an internet search, with only 2% having seen an advertisement for it.

**Fig 3.4**



Given that those on low incomes are less likely to be able to access the internet, it is important that Family Rights Group should generate a higher profile. Whilst for charities on tight budgets, the cost of advertising may be too high, it may yet be possible to increase consumer awareness by, for example, linking to social work training courses, local authority social work teams, and increasing internet



presence on the sites of other, subject relevant, agencies such as the Department for Education's website or Parentline.

## Key Findings

- Nearly all callers (92%) had contacted other agencies for help with only partial or no success. This research suggests that Family Rights Group has a highly capable and knowledgeable advice line which is possibly unique in England and Wales. Although as a charity its funds will be limited, it would also seem that it may need to advertise more widely, for example, by acquiring a more prominent web presence on the sites of other agencies.
- The overwhelming majority of callers (94%) found the advice line helpful, with only three callers finding it unhelpful.
- Callers value Family Rights Group's advice line because they are listened to, and are given clear, knowledgeable and appropriate information
- Family Rights Group appear to hold a niche position in this field. Callers particularly valued the fact that Family Rights Group were independent and to these callers' knowledge, the sole purveyor (with the exception of solicitors) of such a wide range of legal and family rights-related knowledge.
- The vast majority of callers reported the call having made a change in their practical or emotional well-being. No negative impacts were reported. Only four callers said that nothing had changed.

- All callers felt it important that the advice line should exist and with one exception, all callers would recommend it to others, and some had already done so.
- Callers appreciate being sent the advice sheets, or being able to download them from the website. The limited budgets of the majority of this sample suggests that the more traditional mailing of advice sheets should continue.
- Advice sheets are also particularly useful and empowering for parents in meetings, and enabling them to understand and to take part.
- Thematic analysis of the qualitative data around any identified need for improvement showed that the most important theme was that the line could not be improved, followed by the need to advertise more widely, and a desire for face-to-face provision and longer opening hours (including evenings).
- Just over half of the callers had found out about Family Rights Group using an internet search. However, given the link between low income and internet use, it is important that Family Rights Group should find ways of advertising more widely. Possible avenues include ensuring that social work lecturers, trainers and local authorities are aware of the site, as well as ensuring links on other agency websites.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **WERE OUTCOMES IMPROVED?**

#### **Did calling the advice line make a difference?**

It may be appropriate here to look at what callers said about the impact of phoning the advice line. There were no negative impacts, although a few callers (N=3) mentioned that nothing had changed either. All of these are listed below:

'It made no difference. In my situation there was nothing more that could be done.'

'Things are probably the same as the situation isn't very good at all.'

'I still haven't got what I wanted. Nothing has changed'.

However, in the vast majority of cases, when asked whether calling the advice line had made a difference, callers said that it had improved outcomes for them in a practical or emotional way.

#### **Where outcomes improved**

Many callers felt that calling the advice line had helped their case or their abilities to achieve a positive outcome:

'Family Rights Group gave me legal advice. When my ex-partner disappeared with my son I went to Court for a Residence Order. Previously we had shared my son but I was worried and wanted some legal status.'

'Family Rights Group gave me help and good advice. They told me things I never knew. My solicitors should have told me that, but he never did. I'm very pleased with Family Rights Group. Without it I wouldn't have known about the chance of revoking the Order and my kids would have gone for adoption straight away.'

'Family Rights Group gave us that little push to go down the legal road.'

'I could sort it out in my mind; it all came together like bits of a jigsaw.'

'We needed financial help and we found out we could get it. The child is now with us.'

'I think social workers are very difficult. We have different views on issues. My son has afro hair - his foster carers are white and don't know how to manage it. Social services complain if I cut his hair. Also he always looks scruffy. I buy him clothes. Family Rights Group helped me to manage this and keep in contact'.

'It helped me to articulate my case in the terms the local authority was using and see it from their point of view so I was able to better navigate my way through the procedures and get the evidence they wanted.'

'It improved my parenting because they told me to do some courses and that helped me when I had contact with the children.'

'It put my mind at rest. It's now up to the judge to agree contact. . . . Family Rights Group explained our rights and we feel more secure.'

'It was a legally complex situation. We took their advice and were able to take on the social workers.'

'Social workers are difficult and I'm terrified of them. Family Rights Group helped me to manage them - basically to say very little, don't babble on and to just answer their questions.'

'The advice empowered me . . . I'd say knowledge is power and I can now understand how the local authority are working. It has enabled me to ask my solicitors and social services the right questions. Without that knowledge my granddaughter would have been adopted.'

'The social workers were very sure of themselves and had the power to place the (grand)children elsewhere. They blackmail emotional grandparents into coping with young children. It's wrong to pressure us into 'solutions' we don't feel comfortable with. Knowing the facts helps.'

'They gave me back the power to stand up for myself.'

'They were so knowledgeable. They gave me more confidence as I was really struggling not knowing what I could do to help the situation.'

'Without Family Rights Group the children would certainly be in foster care.'

'Definitely different - the plan was for them to go into foster care that day, but the children came home with us.'

'We would still be going round in circles if we hadn't rung. We were just stuck in the mud.'

'We would have inappropriately obtained a Residence Order.'

'We would just be going along as before with changes of plans and the little boy getting miserable and upset.'

'When I phoned I was bordering on depression. It helped me get out of this hole'.

'We wouldn't have known where to go, what to do. We would have probably been tearing our hair out. There was a total lack of interest from the social care agencies.'

'I couldn't have done without it.'

'It felt more comfortable to have someone advise me. It gave me more confidence.'

'I honestly think i would have had another breakdown'.

'I think there'd be a great deal of difference. We wouldn't have the information at hand that we now have.'

'I would have been worse off, I might have put my son back into care.'

'I would have higher levels of frustration. I would never have found my way through the maze. Talking to people who know is really helpful. Totally invaluable and absolutely essential.'

'I wouldn't have known to contact a solicitor.'

'I'd be a lot more in the dark about the legal side and the time-scale'

'I'd have probably been taken to court and wouldn't know my rights or where I stand.'

'I'd still be running around like a crazy woman not knowing what was going on, I wouldn't have got to the case conference . . . It's so important to have something in place to help parents, other than social workers.'

'If Family Rights Group wasn't there social services would have a hay day and parents would be lost over what to do and how.'

'It helped me to decide what to do.'

'If I hadn't phoned, it would have been completely different. We would have had no support and couldn't have kept the child.'

'Our child might have gone into full time care. Its made us more informed and empowered.'

'Nothing for my children but it has helped me a lot more. I'm more aware of things. I have more understanding.'

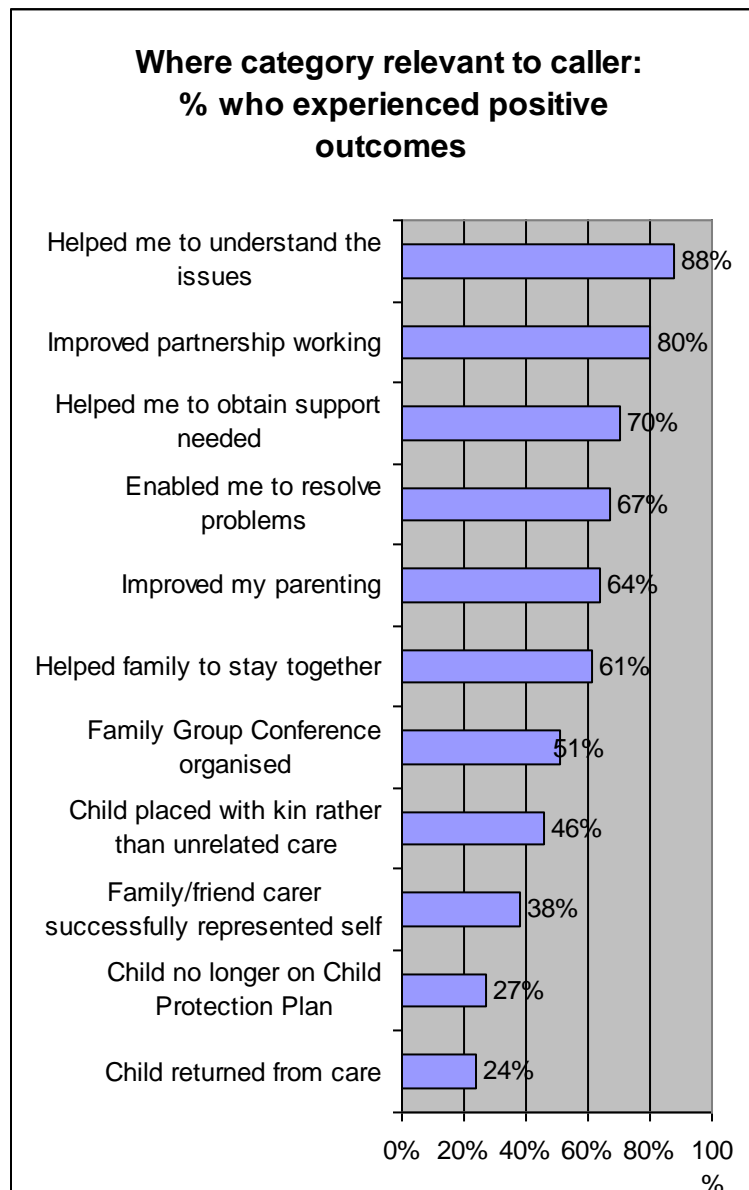
'It gave me peace of mind; reduced my stress!'

'The advice they gave me meant I was able to fill in the forms and file at Court. I had two solicitors who were both useless and expensive. They said I was ineligible for legal aid, so i did the forms myself - it seems okay'

### **Improvements in key areas**

Respondents were also asked whether calling the advice line had improved, or not, particular aspects of their lives. The results showed that outcomes were improved across all areas, and particularly for help in understanding the issues and for improving partnership working.

Fig. 4.1



NB: Respondents reported more than one area of improvement

### The interaction between advice and outcome

We have already seen how the advice line helped callers to understand the issues. However, it may be less clear how it can help callers in other, more practical areas, to achieve positive outcomes. Analysis of the qualitative data



shows how there is a play between the advice they received and the likelihood of achieving a more positive outcome. Where the call enabled the respondent to improve partnership working or helped the family to stay together, the qualitative data showed both how the right advice can empower and enable callers, and how improved partnership working can produce more positive outcomes than might otherwise have been anticipated.

### **Improved partnership working**

'I work better with social workers as before I got a bit agitated'.

'It gave me a voice and confidence to speak with professionals'.

'It helped me to articulate my case in the terms the local authority was using and see it from their point of view, so I was able to better navigate my way through the procedures and get the evidence they wanted'.

'I'd say knowledge is power and I can now understand how the local authority are working. It has enabled me to ask my solicitors and social services the right questions. Without that knowledge my granddaughter would have been adopted ages ago.'

'I needed the knowledge to understand what they were talking about.'

'It really helped to know what my rights under the law were and the sections of the Act. I was then able to ask for appropriate help properly and to express myself properly in social services' own language.'

'I got a clearer view . . . understanding the local authority more. Also I'm not expecting things straight away.'

## **Helping family to stay together**

'I'm very pleased with Family Rights Group. Without it I wouldn't have known about the chance of revoking the Order and my kids would have gone for adoption straight away.'

'We (grandparents) didn't want an Order as we were being pushed into it. The decisions taken by social services were turned on their head, and the children are going back to mum'.

'Social services were adamant that adoption was the best way, but it was difficult to find adoptive parents for them. There are two children and one boy has foetal alcohol syndrome. Initially we (grandparents) thought it was all too much, and we thought the little girl would have a better chance by adoption. We wanted just the boy. But there was no discussion and the children were placed for adoption. It took two years to get them back. Meanwhile the children were suffering. The good thing was that with Family Rights Group we battled on until we had a good outcome. The children are traumatised though - their mother died, they had two foster carers, no security.'

'My son now has contact two hours a week, legal aid and a solicitor.'

'I didn't want a Special Guardianship Order. I stood up to the social worker so that the kids could remain on s.20 (Children Act 1989: voluntary accommodation) as I want them to return to their mum one day. I value social services' support now. I managed to get fostering allowances and now all works well'.

## **Enabling and achieving**

Analysis of quantitative data showed that where respondents reported that calling the advice line had helped them to understand the issues, there were statistically significant correlations with feeling better able to cope, feeling more confident

about dealing with the situation, experiencing improved partnership working, feeling more confident when dealing with professionals, and feeling enabled to resolve their problems. Family/friends carers also reported that things were better.

**Table 4.1**

**Respondents Who Reported That Calling the Advice  
Line Had Helped Them To Understand The Issues (88%)  
- Correlations With Positive Outcomes**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>% Within Variable Agreeing</b>	<b>Chi-square*</b>
It helped me to cope	95%	( $\chi^2=24.65$ , 4df, $p=.000$ )***
More confident about dealing with situation	82%	( $\chi^2=21.10$ , 6df, $p=.002$ )***
Improved partnership working	78%	( $\chi^2=37.45$ , 4df, $p=.000$ )***
Compared to before, family/friends carers find that things are better	75%	( $\chi^2=19.61$ , 4df, $p=.001$ )***
Improved confidence dealing with social workers and other professionals	74%	( $\chi^2=15.891$ , 6df, $p=.014$ )**
Helped to obtain the support needed	71%	( $\chi^2=20.68$ , 4df, $p=.000$ )***
Enabled me to resolve my problems	67%	( $\chi^2=17.85$ , 4df, $p=.001$ )***

\*  $p<.05$ ; \*\*  $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

**Improving capacity**

Respondents were also asked whether, since telephoning Family Rights Group, their capacity had changed in relation to nine key areas. The results are set out below.

**Table 4.2**

**Respondents' Capacity  
In Relation to 9 Key Areas**

<b>Key Area</b>	<b>Better</b>	<b>The Same</b>	<b>Worse</b>
Understanding of the law/rights	86%	14%	0%
Confidence in ability to deal with situation	75%	21%	4%
Confidence in dealing with social workers/professionals	74%	23%	3%
Chances of maintaining contact	65%	35%	0%
How you feel about yourself	63%	32%	5%
Chances of staying together as a family	62%	22%	6%
Understanding of your child/children's needs	59%	41%	0%
How stressed you feel	42%	42%	16%
Relationships with other family members	35%	57%	8%

Family/friends carers were also asked separately whether they thought there had been any change in circumstances since telephoning the advice line.

**Table 4.2**

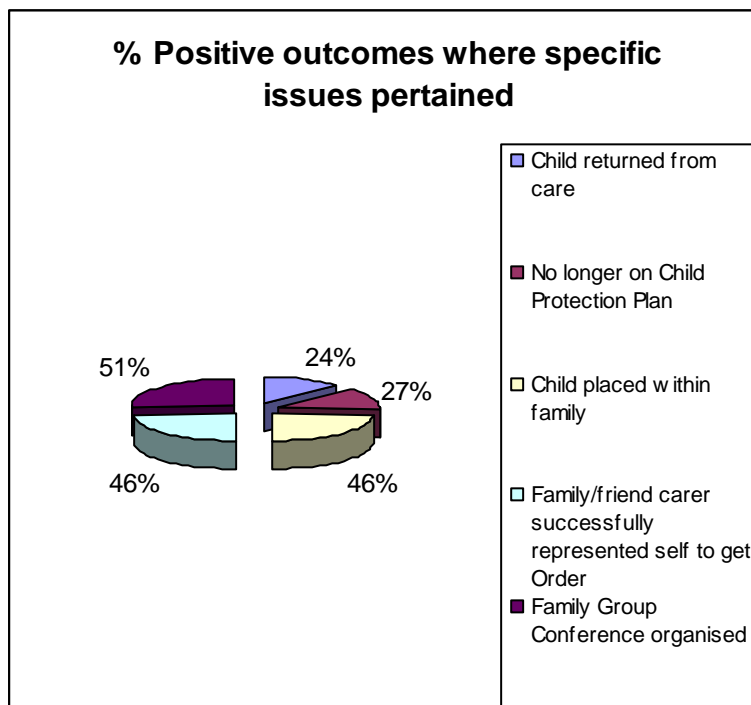
<b>Key Area</b>	<b>Better</b>	<b>The Same</b>	<b>Worse</b>
Your confidence in dealing with your social worker/other professionals	87%	13%	0%
Your contact with the child/children in question is -	78%	22%	0%

Compared with before you made the call, things are now -	74%	21%	5%
Your relationship now with the child is -	55%	45%	0%

Whilst chance and circumstance may play their part in improving outcomes, the persistence with which respondents showed an improvement since the call suggests a very positive influence. Most notably, once again callers showed that they felt more knowledgeable about their rights, the law and procedures, and were therefore more empowered and more able to deal confidently and in partnership with other professionals.

Where specific issues pertained, such as care proceedings, callers were asked about outcomes.

**Fig 4.2**



Although the improvements identified above (Fig 4.2) were relatively modest, it is to be remembered that for the most part callers may have rung at a point at which no change had seemed possible.

### **Outcomes for grandparents and family/friends carers**

As we saw in Chapter 2, grandparents and family carers in this study were under particular stress as measured by the GHQ-12, were often confused about their options and under-funded, trying to do their best to support their grandchildren.

Given the importance of grandparents in particular as a resource for positive child outcomes (Griggs et al 2009; DCSF 2008), it is encouraging to note that 60% of grandparents reported that the advice given had helped the family to stay together, 90% felt more confident in their dealings with social workers and practitioners and 100% of grandparents with concerns about contact felt that their chances had improved. In the light of recent research (Griggs et al 2009; DCSF 2008) it is vital that grandparents should be appropriately supported and guided if children's outcomes are to improve.

### **Psychological functioning as measured by the GHQ-12**

As we saw in Chapter 1, the GHQ-12 scores of this sample were much higher than those found in community samples. The Health Survey for England 2005 and the Scottish Health Survey for 2003 both used the GHQ-12 with the same cut off point of 4 or more (GHQ bimodal). Both surveys reported women having higher scores than men. In England 15% of women had a high score of 4 or more compared with 11% of men, and in Scotland the figures were 17% for women compared with 13% for men. In this sample, a high proportion, 36% of respondents had scores of 4+ using GHQ bimodal scoring. Although the ratios were similar cross gender, they were almost double those found in the two

Health Surveys, with 31% of men and 38% of women having high scores indicating high levels of psychological distress.

Although the proportion of those with abnormal psychological functioning was relatively high in this sample, there is some evidence that it might have been higher were it not for the support they received from the advice line. It is clear that parents and others felt more knowledgeable, more empowered and reported being more likely to work positively to achieve their aims across a range of areas. Although when bivariate analyses were run, none of the correlations between reduced bimodal scoring and reporting of positive outcomes was significant, those who reported positive outcomes (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2) were also less likely to report abnormal levels of psychological functioning as measured by the GHQ-12. This may suggest that receiving the correct advice that enables respondents to cope more effectively with their circumstances is also linked to reducing stress and improving psychological function.

### **Key Findings**

- There were no negative impacts and in the vast majority of cases, when asked whether calling the advice line had made a difference, callers said that it had improved outcomes for them in a practical or emotional way.
- Outcomes were improved across all areas, including understanding of the law and rights, improved partnership working, improved chances of maintaining contact, a greater likelihood of staying together as a family, their understanding of their children's needs, their levels of stress and their ability to obtain the support they needed.
- There were statistically significant correlations between respondents feeling that they had been helped to understand the issues (88%) and feeling better able to cope, more confident about dealing with the situation,

- report of improved partnership working, family/friends carers finding that things are better, improved confidence dealing with social workers and other professionals, feeling that they had been helped to obtain the support needed, and feeling enabled to resolve their problems.
- In particular, a very high proportion of respondents felt that they understood the issues better, had improved their partnership working and had been helped to obtain the support that they needed.
  - The vast majority of family/friends carers reported being more confident when dealing with social workers/other professionals, to have improved contact with the child or children in question, and to have a better relationship with the child/children with 74% saying that things were now better than before they made the call.
  - Qualitative data showed both how the right advice can empower and enable callers, and how improved partnership working can produce more positive outcomes than might otherwise have been anticipated.
  - There is some evidence that levels of psychological distress, as measured by the GHQ-12, may have been reduced amongst those (the majority) who experienced positive outcomes. This may suggest that receiving the correct advice that enables respondents to cope more effectively with their circumstances is also linked to reducing stress and improving psychological function.



## CHAPTER 5

### COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Creese et al (2002) and Freedberg and Yazdanpanah (2003) have shown that health care evaluations are usually cost effectiveness analyses or cost minimization studies. This is because it is hard to place a monetary value on saving life or improved health, and as a consequence, outcomes may be measured in other ways, such as Disability Adjusted Life Years. Similarly interventions aimed at improving social outcomes pose difficulties in terms of placing a monetary value, for example, on improved parent-child contact. As a result, this evaluation will adopt a 'willingness to pay' approach to cost benefit analysis (Brent 2003), which will evaluate the costs and benefits of the advice line in terms of the public's willingness to pay for them (benefits) or willingness to pay to avoid them (costs). In this, it will link to a social return on investment methodology, analyzing investment in terms of lives improved.

#### **Methodology**

Outcome data from the key findings presented in preceding chapters was analysed in relation to research evidence for outcomes (cost or benefit). The findings are presented in tabular form.

Table 5.1

Key Finding	Benefit	Cost if unresolved
<p><b><u>Improved partnership working</u></b> Vast majority (80%) of callers' recorded improved partnership working with social workers and other professionals</p> <p>Including 83% of those involved in care proceedings, 100% of those involved with looked after children, and 56% of those involved with child protection.</p> <p>74% reported feeling more confident in their dealings with social workers and other professionals</p>	<p>Partnership working between parents and social work and other professionals seen as key and embedded in Children Act 1989 and subsequent Guidance and regulations.</p> <p>Where care proceedings are involved, parental failure to cooperate, is often seen as a key precipitating factor (Brophy 2006).</p> <p>Partnership working is key to timely assessments, including core assessments and is likely to reduce the need for Emergency Protection Orders or Police Protection Orders (Broadhurst and Holt 2010)</p> <p>C4EO (2010) meta-analysis of programmes indicates that positive outcomes (e.g. lower placement rates and recurrence, improved parental attitudes and behaviours) are gained when there are high levels of participant involvement.</p> <p>The Public Law Outline (2008) places an emphasis on improving working with parents approaching care proceedings, reinforcing</p>	<p>Child death inquiries (e.g. Jasmine Beckford, Kimberly Carlile) show the importance of professionals working in partnership with parents to assess the child.</p> <p>Lack of partnership working increases risk of delays in assessment under s.47 of the Children Act 1989 and to incomplete core assessments, leading to –</p> <p>Increased risk of Emergency Protection Orders or Police Protection Orders being made.</p> <p>Increased likelihood of ensuing full care proceedings (s.31 Children Act 1989).</p> <p>Increased likelihood of delays in proceedings before Court.</p> <p>Parents who do not cooperate are likely to hamper assessments and function of the Public Law Outline (Masson 2010).</p> <p>Increased parental stress/conflict leading to increased risk for poor child psycho-social</p>

	<p>the 'no order' principle embedded in the Children Act 1989.</p> <p>Partnership working between parents/carers and professionals seen as key to effective working of Public Law Outline (Broadhurst and Holt 2010)</p> <p>Effective parental engagement can reduce the range of issues coming before the Court, thus expediting proceedings more swiftly (Broadhurst and Holt 2010)</p> <p><u>A partnership approach is more likely to lead to:</u></p> <p>Greater family satisfaction with professionals (Cleaver 2000; Cleaver and Walker, with Meadows 2004)</p> <p>More likelihood of parental attitude/behaviour change (Aldgate et al 2006).</p> <p>Increased likelihood of improved child/young person wellbeing through better negotiated provision of services (Scheer &amp; Gavazzi 2009)</p>	<p>functioning (McCarty et al, 2003; Patterson &amp; Forgatch, 1990; Patterson, Reid &amp; Dishion 1992)</p> <p>Where families disengage from services or become hostile, practitioners are often unable to make accurate judgments or to formulate assessments or plans (C4EO 2010).</p> <p>Evidence that parental resistance to intervention and consequent poor outcomes derives in part from their failure to be involved in assessments and treatment plans (C4EO 2010).</p> <p>Lack of parental cooperation affects practitioners' ability to offer services directly to children (Brandon et al 2005b, 2009)</p> <p>Lack of parental engagement and hostility are common among families where there is recurring child maltreatment (Brandon et al 2005b).</p> <p>Parents who are not empowered are more likely to feign co-operation rather than being genuinely co-operative, with</p>
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		consequences for child outcomes (CE40).
<p><b><u>Better understanding of issues involved</u></b></p> <p>Vast majority of callers (88%) reported a better understanding of the issues involved in their case, and 86% reported a better understanding of the law and/or their rights.</p> <p>There were statistically significant correlations between respondents feeling that they had been helped to understand the issues (88%) and feeling better able to cope, more confident about dealing with the situation, reporting improved partnership working, family/friends carers finding that things are better, improved confidence dealing with social workers and other professionals, feeling that they had been helped to obtain the support needed, and feeling enabled to resolve their problems.</p>	<p>‘An understanding of child protection processes and the power dynamics involved was seen to be important for parents’ engagement.’ (C4EO 2010: 9).</p> <p>Likely to increase parent participation and engagement, as research suggests parents struggle to make sense of the court process and find it confusing and alienating (Broadhurst and Holt 2010).</p> <p>Interventions that target sources of self-efficacy and provide domain-specific learning experiences are effective at increasing self-efficacy for women and men.(Bakken et al 2010)</p> <p>Belief in self efficacy is associated with improved affect, motivation and action and self assurance can determine whether people make good use of their competencies. Increased knowledge is likely to overrule self doubt and regulate action (Bandura 1986; 1997).</p> <p>The emotional arousal associated with, e.g. child protection, can lead to anxiety and negative self</p>	<p>Not being given adequate opportunities to discuss their understanding of their case or future plans is linked to subsequent parental resistance to practitioners. (Dumbrill 2006).</p> <p>Individuals are frustrated by perceived resistance to their wish fulfillment. Failure to understand the issues involved is likely to lead to greater frustration. Allied to this is passive-aggressive behaviour and a propensity towards aggression when people cannot see how the obstacle can be removed (Miller 1941; Berkowitz 1969).</p> <p>Aggressive and passive-aggressive behaviours frustrate implementation of child protection procedures such as assessment and lead to poor partnership working, with implications for delays in curtailing risk or court proceedings. Examples of such behaviour can be seen in serious case reviews, e.g. the death of Khyra Ishaq.</p> <p>Where parents are</p>

	<p>talk, in turn associated with decreased efficacy. Positive role modeling, acquisition of knowledge and verbal support can generate a 'you can do it' approach (Stalker 1994) that promotes self efficacy and empowerment.</p>	<p>hostile towards practitioners, the latter experience anxiety and low levels of confidence, which in turn link to failure to conduct home visits, and a failure to make objective judgments and/or to complete assessments or plans (Littlechild 2000; Stanley and Goddard 2002; Littlechild 2005; Brandon et al 2008a and b; Ofsted, 2008).</p> <p>C4EO (2010: 8) note that 'Families' lack of engagement or hostility hampered practitioners' decision-making capabilities and follow-through with assessments and plans'.</p>
<p><b><u>Families were helped to obtain the support they needed</u></b>          In this research, 70% of respondents said that calling the advice line helped them to obtain the support they needed.</p>	<p>Where parents obtain the support they need they are less likely to become involved in s.47 investigations or care proceedings (Dept of Health 1995).</p> <p>Whether help is one-off, short-term or prolonged, support which is non-stigmatising and which promotes self-efficacy can improve family wellbeing (Roberts et al 2009)</p> <p>Parenting support benefits families, including cognitive interventions</p>	<p>Parents who do not obtain the support needed are more likely to have children at risk of 'significant harm' (Dept of Health 1995).</p> <p>Parents in touch with social services who do not receive the help they need report feeling that things are likely to reach crisis point (Buchanan et al 2002).</p> <p>Difficulty in obtaining support is linked to higher risk for psychological stress,</p>

	that alter beliefs, attitudes and self perceptions (Moran et al 2004).	which in itself is a risk factor for child maltreatment (Ritchie 2006; Egeland, Breitenbucher and Rosenberg 1980; Engfer & Schneewind 1982 ).
<p><b><u>Feeling less stressed</u></b> 42% of respondents reported feeling less stressed following their call to Family Rights Group's advice line.</p> <p>Where respondents reported improved outcomes, GHQ-12 scores tended to be lower.</p>	<p>Where parents are less stressed, they are likely to have more time for positive parent-child interactions leading to better child outcomes (Pearlin et al 1981).</p> <p>Parents are likely to feel positive about services that reduce stress, empower and increase their skills base (Manji et al 2005).</p>	<p>'High levels of stress' are a risk factor for families at risk of recurring, serious child maltreatment (C4EO 2010).</p> <p>Perceived stress is linked to increased risk for child maltreatment (Egeland, Breitenbucher and Rosenberg 1980; Engfer &amp; Schneewind 1982)</p>
<p><b><u>Helping the family to stay together or to have contact</u></b></p> <p>In this research family/friends carers and particularly grandparents wanted help and advice on how to help their families.</p> <p>60% of grandparents reported that the advice given had helped the family to stay together.</p> <p>90% felt more confident in their dealings with social workers and practitioners.</p> <p>100% of grandparents</p>	<p>A grandparent's active involvement has been found to be significantly associated with better adjusted adolescents. Grandparent involvement in education or school is also linked to fewer child conduct problems. Talking to grandparents about future plans has been associated with fewer overall emotional and behavioural difficulties, and fewer peer problems (Griggs et al 2009).</p> <p>Outcomes for children placed in family/friends care are as good and sometimes better than for</p>	<p>Children placed in stranger foster care are more likely to have more moves in care and placements are less likely to last (DCSF 2008)</p> <p>Where extended family are not consulted, cases are more likely to go to Court (DCSF 2008)</p> <p>Lack of grandparent involvement is linked to greater risk of child emotional and behavioural problems (Griggs et al 2009)</p>

<p>with concerns about contact felt that their chances had improved.</p>	<p>children placed in stranger foster care(Farmer and Moyers 2005; DCSF 2007:1) .</p> <p>These children are also enabled to maintain contact with their wider family, to consolidate their cultural identity and to maintain school and social networks. Family/friends care also provides a more stable environment, in which children ‘feel loved, report high levels of satisfaction, appear to be as safe and their behaviour is perceived to be less of a problem’ (DCSF 2007).</p>	
<p><b><u>Improved parenting</u></b> Of those who felt their parenting was an issue, 64% said that calling the advice line had improved their parenting.</p>	<p>Child report of praise, encouragement, physical affection, good communication and time spent with parents is protective against behaviour problems including drug/alcohol misuse (Cohen et al 1994).</p> <p>Supportive parents who tend to use low levels of coercion are more likely to have adolescents who are socially competent (Noller and Patton 1990)</p> <p>Authoritative parenting is associated with a greater internal locus of control and self concept on the Harter Scale (scholastic competence, social</p>	<p>Harsh, neglectful and abusive parenting styles are likely to have serious consequences for child physical and mental health (Eaves et al, 1997;Goodman and Stevenson, 1989).</p> <p>Lack of nurturing and involved parenting increases the risk for early anti-social behaviour and deviant peer relationships (Scaramella et al 2002)..</p> <p>Children are at risk of ‘significant harm’ (Children Act 1989, s.47) when they are physically, emotionally or sexually abused or neglected.</p>

	<p>acceptance, close friendships, behavioural conduct and global self-worth) than permissive or authoritarian parenting (McClun 1998).</p> <p>Authoritative parenting also linked with social competence, behaviour and academic competence. (Steinberg et al, 1989; Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn et al, 1991; Steinberg et al, 1991).</p>	
<p><b><u>Advice line quality</u></b> The overwhelming majority (94%) of respondents found Family Rights Group's advice line helpful and valued being listened to and being given clear, knowledgeable and appropriate information by an independent provider.</p>	<p>Families are more likely to engage where they feel that they are being 'listened to' and 'understood' (Dale 2004; Platt 2008; Yatchmenoff 2008).</p> <p>The National Family and Parenting Institute (2002) notes that 'How parents feel about the support they receive is critical'.</p> <p>How parenting support is delivered is crucial. Parents need to feel in control of their situation and able to solve their problems, even with help, by themselves (Quinton 2004).</p>	<p>Respondents in this sample show what might have happened without the advice line. These are just a few quotations from Chapter 4:</p> <p>'Without it I wouldn't have known about the chance of revoking the Order and my kids would have gone for adoption straight away'.</p> <p>'We needed financial help and we found out we could get it. The child is now with us.'</p> <p>'It has enabled me to ask my solicitors and social services the right questions. Without that knowledge my granddaughter would have been adopted.'</p> <p>'Without Family Rights Group the children would</p>



		<p>certainly be in foster care.'</p> <p>'We would just be going along as before with changes of plans and the little boy getting miserable and upset.'</p>
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## Key Findings

- 80% of callers reported improved partnership working with social workers and other professionals. The benefits associated with improved partnership working are likely to reduce costs to the public purse engendered by delays in assessment, consequent delays in Court/Care proceedings, likely associated increased risk of 'significant harm', and consequent poor child outcomes.
- 88% of callers reported having a better understanding of the issues involved. This was significantly linked with them feeling better able to cope, feeling more confident about dealing with their situation, improved partnership working and feeling enabled to resolve their problems. These findings are likely to promote parental participation and reduce aggressive and passive-aggressive behaviours, including resistance, which frustrate professionals' ability to carry out assessments and to promote the welfare of the child.
- 70% of callers reported obtaining advice that enabled them to obtain the support they needed. This in turn is likely to reduce the costs associated with s.47 (Children Act 1989) inquiries, and to reduce parental stress which in itself is associated with greater risk for child maltreatment.

- 100% of grandparents felt that their chances of contact with a grandchild had improved following their call, with 90% feeling more confident in their dealings with social workers/professionals and 60% reporting that the advice they received had helped the family to stay together. Grandparent involvement is likely to provide better outcomes for children, and outcomes for children placed in their care have been shown to be at least as good, and sometimes better than 'stranger' care. By contrast, the cost of 'stranger' foster care, including the cost in financial and emotional terms of more moves in care, are likely to be considerably higher.
- 64% reported that the advice they received had improved their parenting, which is likely to improve child outcomes and to reduce the cost to the state associated with delinquency, poor educational achievement, health and risk of significant harm.
- 94% of respondents found the advice line helpful and valued being listened to and being given clear, knowledgeable and appropriate information. How parents feel about the support they receive is critical to the likelihood of further engagement and provides them with the agency necessary for partnership working.

## CONCLUSION

Cost-benefit analysis suggests that the Family Rights Group advice line works positively and preventatively to enable parents and carers to work with social workers and other professionals to obtain positive outcomes for the children involved. Data collected in this report suggests that without this advice line, there is a risk that parents would be less co-operative with social workers and other professionals, have less capacity to gain insight into their situation, and be less likely to receive the support needed for their children. Where children are at risk of 'significant harm', it is vital that parents should co-operate with professionals to enable assessments and to expedite, where necessary, Court proceedings. This evaluation suggests that many of the respondents were frustrated and disillusioned with social services at the time of their call, partly because they were unaware of the law and of their options, but that following the advice received, they reported being better able to work in partnership with social workers and other professionals.

It is vital that an advice line in this field should enable parents, grandparents and other family/friends carers to work with social workers to provide the best possible outcome for the child, and in this, the Family Rights Group advice line appears to have made a highly positive contribution. Improved partnership working, finding the support they needed, feeling less stressed, more able to cope and having a better understanding of the issues are all more likely to produce positive outcomes for children and families and, importantly, to reduce the need for more expensive and draconian interventions such as section 47 investigations and Care proceedings. Where suitable grandparents and family/friends carers can be enabled to care for children who would otherwise be the subject of Care proceedings, this will be a benefit to the public purse as well as to child and family outcomes (DCSF 2008; Griggs et al 2009). However, without the information and support offered by Family Rights Group, many grandparents and other family/friends carers might relinquish their grandchildren

to 'stranger' foster care or fail to obtain the appropriate Order to enable them to care appropriately for their grandchildren. The support offered by Family Rights Group in these circumstances offers a considerable cost reduction in both financial and social terms, including and above all, the welfare of the child.

Although Family Rights Group may want to consider how better to raise public awareness of its existence as well as perhaps reconsidering whether it can make lines available in the evening, this on the whole reflects how important these callers felt the advice line to be. In turn, limited budgets may inhibit what is possible. However, this evaluation of the Family Rights Group advice line found that it had no negative impacts, and that it improved outcomes for callers, with consequent likely positive impacts on child wellbeing. It also found that the benefits offered in practical, safeguarding and financial terms are likely to be substantial. Family Rights Group's aim, to help people to understand their rights, to explore the issues which have arisen and to be enabled to begin the process of resolution through partnership working, is clearly fulfilled. It occupies a niche position in the family support market, and is valued for its capacity to listen, its independence and above all its expertise.

'I'd still be running around like a crazy woman not knowing what was going on. I wouldn't have got to the case conference. . . It's so important to have something in place to help parents, other than social workers.'

'You can't improve it any more. It's very good'

*The End*

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