

Charity Registration No. 1015665

Company Registration No. 2702928 (England and Wales)

FRG LIMITED
TRUSTEES' REPORT AND ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

FRG LIMITED

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Trustees	R Jones R Harding R Stringfellow D Jackson E Monck N Priestley A Couldrick R Harvey C Whittaker E Hudson S Woodcock
Secretary	S Caldwell
Charity number	1015665
Company number	2702928
Principal address	The Print House 18 Ashwin Street London E8 3DL
Registered office	The Print House 18 Ashwin Street London E8 3DL
Auditors	Frances Wilde Warner Wilde 4 Marigold Drive Bisley Surrey GU24 9SF
Bankers	Unity Trust Bank plc Nine Brindleyplace Birmingham B1 2HB

FRG LIMITED

CONTENTS

	Page
Trustees' report	1 - 10
Statement of Trustees' responsibilities	11
Independent auditors' report	12 - 13
Statement of financial activities	14
Balance sheet	15 - 16
Notes to the accounts	17 - 23

FRG LIMITED

TRUSTEES' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

The Trustees present their report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2010.

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the accounts and comply with the charity's governing document, the Companies Act 1985 and the Statement of Recommended Practice, "Accounting and Reporting by Charities", issued in March 2005.

Structure, governance and management

The Trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year were:

R Jones	
E Owens	(Resigned 30 November 2009)
A Price	(Resigned 30 November 2009)
R Derriman	(Resigned 30 November 2009)
R Harding	
R Stringfellow	
C Lambrick	(Resigned 31 May 2009)
D Jackson	
E Monck	
N Priestley	
A Couldrick	(Appointed 30 November 2009)
R Harvey	(Appointed 30 November 2009)
C Whittaker	
E Hudson	(Appointed 30 November 2009)
S Woodcock	(Appointed 30 November 2009)

Directors' Responsibilities

The directors acknowledge their responsibility as detailed on page 4 for the preparation of the charity's annual financial statements, upon which the auditors are obliged to report to the members of the charity.

Appointment of directors

Every person desiring to become a member must, before she/he can do so, sign and deliver to the company an application for admission in such form as the Management Committee may from time to time require. The Management Committee may, on passing of a special resolution, determine the membership of any member of the company.

Organisation

The governing document of FRG Limited is the memorandum and articles of association incorporated 1st April 1992 and as amended by special resolution dated 22nd April 1993.

The Management Committee

The Management Committee shall manage the business of the company and may raise or borrow for the purposes of the company such money as they think fit and may secure the repayment of or raise such sum as aforesaid by mortgage or charge upon any part of the property and assets of the company. It shall appoint and employ all such officers and servants as they consider necessary and shall (subject to the provisions of the Memorandum of Association) regulate their duties and fix their salaries.

FRG LIMITED

TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

The directors have assessed the major risks to which FRG Limited is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to these risks.

Objectives and activities

The main objectives of the charity throughout the year were:

1. The provision of an advice and advocacy service for families.
2. The provision of training for social workers, lawyers and others working in the childcare field.
3. Undertaking policy and research projects to highlight and disseminate good practise.
4. Campaigning for change in legislation, policy and procedures which reflect the objectives of the organisation.

The charity number is 1015665. The charity is a company limited by guarantee, the company number is 02702928.

The Trustees have paid due regard to the Charities Commission guidance regarding public benefit in accordance with section 4 Charities Act 2006.

Review of activities

Once again it has been a hectic year in which the charity's achievements are out of proportion with its size. The financial climate has been a difficult one, which we've so far weathered, with reserves slightly growing in anticipation of very tough times ahead.

The need amongst children and their families for Family Rights Group has never been greater. We are advising many more vulnerable parents now than at any time in our past, assisting them to access the services they need, to understand and face up to agencies' child protection concerns, to have a voice in decisions about their child and to challenge, where legitimate. Our promotion of family group conferences and advocacy for families has enabled many children to live safely within their extended family and prevented them entering into care, at a significant saving to the state. Moreover, we have had some significant victories in influencing policy and legislation, including the Government issuing draft family and friends care guidance and extending the definition of parent in the Child Poverty Act 2010 so that it encompassed family and friends carers.

All members of the management committee continue to make an important contribution to our governance. We warmly welcome Andy Couldrick, Sue Woodcock and Rachel Harvey on to the management committee. They bring an impressive wealth of knowledge and experience, particularly of social care, management and family group conferences.

We are extremely indebted to the three trustees who stepped down at the AGM. Angela Price was a family and friends carer who served as a trustee for 17 years. Her determination, good humour and unstinting support for the Charity is unbeatable and we're sure she'll stay very much involved. Robin Derriman, a family and friends carer, has stood down due to work commitments. He has taken a consistent hands-on interest in supporting other carers, and his contribution is much valued by Family Rights Group and other family and friends carers. Elwyn Owens was an excellent co-Chair of Family Rights Group; his wisdom, sensitivity and passion is second to none, and we know that he'll always be there for the Charity despite retiring from the Committee.

Rita Stringfellow is now Chair of Trustees. Rita chairs committee meetings, regularly meets with the Chief Executive, Cathy Ashley, and plays a very active role in promoting the Charity.

Everyone on the management committee plays a part in shaping the strategy and direction for the organisation but particular thanks is due to the guiding hand of our treasurer, Ray Harding. There is an active fundraising sub committee which meets at 1 Garden Court, who kindly provide their premises for free.

FRG LIMITED

TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

Family Rights Group achievements over the last year include:

- Over 4,600 families were assisted in 2009/10 by our advice service, an 80% increase in two years and more than in any previous year in the organisation's history.
- The number of unique visitors to our website is continuing to rise, with a growth of over 50% in two years, to 144,000 in 2009/10.
- Our pioneering professional family advocacy service providing face to face advocacy support to 40 families whose children were subject to child protection enquiries. An independent evaluation of the advocacy service found half of social workers consulted thought advocacy had influenced the outcome (1). We have now secured additional funding for a new service - providing direct advocacy to 'entrenched' families in London whose children have been on a child protection plan for over a year.
- In 2009, we helped set up six support groups for family and friends carers and ran fun days for these carers and the children they are raising.
- 1,845 people are registered on the popular family and friends carers discussion board on the Family Rights Group website.
- We successfully lobbied for special guardianship order and residence order allowance to be disregarded from income for the purpose of council tax and housing benefit calculations, to the benefit of a number of family and friends carers

Nevertheless, the combined impact of the recession and the climate in social care following the death of Baby Peter, is having a huge impact upon both families and those working for local authorities. There has been a significant rise in referrals to children's social care services and an even greater increase in numbers of children subject to child protection plans. Care proceeding applications are at record levels, although there is some local variation across the country. There are currently long, expensive delays within the court process, children not being allocated guardians until late into proceedings, a shortage of foster carers and children facing insecurity whilst awaiting decisions about their futures.

Despite partnership working being core to the safeguarding of children, the current child protection process is often poor at engaging with families. The system often feels overwhelming for parents whose fears can easily erupt into hostility and anger. As a result we are getting a rise in calls from family members to our advice line. We regularly receive calls to our advice line from parents who are having difficulties - but who can't get the support they want to prevent family stress escalating because they or their child don't meet the high thresholds set by local authorities for accessing support services. Indeed the lack of statutory entitlement to assessment for support for children in need means that many children and parents/carers do not even have their need for services assessed until the home situation has become critical. Yet later down the line, it is often these same families who, when crisis point is reached, are subject to compulsory state intervention - be it in the child protection or youth justice systems. We also regularly deal with calls from desperate relatives who have stepped in to raise a child on the brink of care. However, financial and other support is only mandatory for children who are in care. Whilst we challenge the local authority on their behalf, when appropriate through our advocacy service including citing case law as relevant, the system in the main remains a postcode lottery whether such relatives receive any practical or financial assistance to help them in their task.

(1) Featherstone B (2009) 'Evaluation of Family Rights Group Advocacy Service 2006-9' (<http://www.frg.org.uk/pdfs/Adv%20eval%202009.pdf>)

FRG LIMITED

TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

The Campaign Agenda

Family Rights Group remains the only organisation in England and Wales that specifically advises, advocates and campaigns on behalf of families whose children are involved with or require social care services because of welfare needs or concerns. Set up in 1974, the charity continues to campaign for reforms to improve the lives of children and families including:

- A right to an assessment for support services if a parent, carer or agency with which the child is involved, believes the child is 'in need';
- A right to independent advice and advocacy for all families who become involved with children's social care services, so that children, parents and wider family members are enabled to have a clearer understanding of the processes in which they are involved and greater ownership of decisions being made about their and their children's lives;
- A right for families to be offered a family group conference before any child is looked after in the care system, so that the families' knowledge and strengths inform decisions about the child and all efforts are made to enable the child to remain safely within the family network. That the resulting family plan from the family group conference is agreed and implemented by agencies, as long as safe, in partnership with the family.
- That government, as part of its anti child-poverty strategy, requires local authorities to provide suitable support services and introduces a national financial allowance for relatives who are raising children who cannot live at home, to assist with the costs of bringing up vulnerable children who would otherwise need to be in care.

We have pressed our agenda by contacting politicians and Children's Services directors and having meetings with ministers, backbench politicians and civil servants. We have given radio interviews, written articles and been quoted in the press. As part of our lobbying strategy, for the first time Family Rights Group, in conjunction with the fostering agency TACT, held fringe meetings at Labour Party and Conservative Party 2009 annual conferences. Speakers at the latter event included Baroness Shireen Ritchie, Chair of the Children and Young People's Board, Local Government Association and Tim Loughton MP, now Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families in the Government.

Bridget Lindley, our Principal Legal Adviser has been appointed the Parents' Stakeholder representative on the Family Justice Council and has set up a parents/relatives' sub-committee, which she chairs and involves members of the FJC, voluntary organisations representing families as well as service users.

Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive, sits on the SCIE/C4EO Vulnerable Children's Advisory Group and the Safeguarding Group. David Roth, Policy Adviser, is a member of the Cafcass Cymru stakeholder group.

Over the year we have attended stakeholder and parliamentary events and drafted amendments and successfully lobbied to influence legislation and guidance. For example, the new Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations which will be implemented in April 2011, have been significantly amended from the initial draft to take into account Family Rights Group's concerns about parents' involvement in their child's reviews being watered down.

We are grateful to the Noel Buxton Trust for helping fund our work in leading the Kinship Care Alliance, which is an informal network of 20 organisations and academics. Over the last year the Charity on behalf of the Kinship Care Alliance has:

- Pooled expertise, set up a family and friends care tax/benefits working group and drawn up policy recommendations including a proposal for a national financial allowance for carers raising children who cannot live with their parents, all encapsulated in a 2 page Manifesto;
 - Sat on a government working group on family and friends care and held meetings with Ministers and cross-departmental officials and advisers to press for immediate action;
 - Drafted amendments for Parliamentarians to table to the Child Poverty Bill;
 - Run an e-lobby campaign to raise awareness and encouraged MPs/parliamentary candidates to sign up to the Alliance's manifesto;
 - Trialed an internet survey on the financial impact of taking on the care of a child, which had over 200 respondents.
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FRG LIMITED

TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

As a direct consequence of this work the Government has:

- Announced in the March 2010 budget that special guardianship order and residence order allowances as well as Section 50 payments made to some Scottish carers would be disregarded as income when calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax. The changes come into effect from April 2011 and in effect will mean that some carers will be gain by up to £47.69 per week per child.
- Amended the Child Poverty Bill to widen the definition of parents;
- Issued draft consultation guidance on family and friends care, which includes a requirement on local authorities to collect data on such arrangements;
- Agreed that Government Departments will work with Family Rights Group to improve data collection and recording.

Advice and Advocacy Service

Advice Service

Our telephone advice service is open every weekday, staffed by experienced child care professionals. We also advise clients who contact us by email and by letter. More than 90% of our callers are mothers, fathers or relatives. The remaining 10% are social care and legal professionals seeking specialist advice.

The main issues on which families contact Family Rights Group are:

- Family support
- Child protection; and
- Placement of children through care proceedings or voluntary accommodation.

As a result of monies until April 2011 from the Department of Children, Schools and Families' Parent Know How Fund (now known as the Department for Education Family Information Direct grant) we are advising more families than ever before. The funding has enabled us to open from 10-3.30pm Monday-Friday, significantly increase the number of lines we operate and provide a call back service to callers who leave a message when the lines are busy. In 2009/10 we were therefore able to advise over 4,500 families in 2009/10 (an increase from 2500 in 2007/8) and the number will continue to increase to 6500 in 2010/11. Nevertheless, demand for the service is also increasing and clearly it is critical we secure government funding for the service post 2011 to ensure its sustainability.

The service has been awarded the Parent Know How Quality Standard.

The service is backed up by an expanding number of detailed, up to date advice sheets for families, on subjects such as the child protection procedures, special guardianship and care proceedings. The relevant advice sheets are sent to callers to the advice line and can be freely downloaded by families and professionals from our website.

FRG LIMITED

TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

Advocacy Services

We are pioneering professional family advocacy for families involved with child welfare services.

Thanks to funding from the Big Lottery Fund and the City Parochial Foundation for the period until June 2009, and subsequent funding from the Community Development Foundation Hardship Fund, we have been able to provide face to face advocacy for some parents in London whose children are subject to child protection enquiries. The service is targeted at parents who are particularly at risk of having their children removed, including young parents and families who have already had a child taken into care. The support of the advocate enables parents to have a fuller understanding of the processes in which they are involved, to feel supported and to be in a stronger position to work co-operatively with local authority children's social care services in the interests of their child. An independent evaluation of the advocacy service published in 2009 found half of social workers consulted thought advocacy had influenced the outcome (2).

Over the last year we have successfully signed partnership agreements with the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Barnet and the City of Westminster. The agreements include the authorities making a financial contribution towards the service. Our face to face advocacy service is focused upon parents in these three local authorities.

100 families, including grandparents struggling with their local authority to get support to raise their grandchildren, were assisted by Family Rights Group's national self and indirect advocacy service. Advocates assist families who contact our advice service, by drafting a tailored letter that the caller can send out in their own name (self advocacy), or by pursuing the case through letters and phone calls to the relevant social care agency (indirect advocacy).

We have drawn up national standards for professional family advocacy which were launched at a conference in June 2009 at which High Court judge, Mr Justice Munby was the key note speaker.

Family and Friends Care

Family Rights Group's internet discussion forum for family and friends carers continues to be extremely popular, having attracted over 20,000 'posts' on over 2,500 discussion topics. Forum users can seek advice about legal matters, such as how the court process works, or what the difference is between various legal orders, as well as what sort of support they are might be able to receive from the local authority or other government agencies. There is also a lot of informal support offered between carers using the forum, with those who have experience of dealing with particular problems offering ideas and encouragement to those who are new to them.

There is a small but growing number of family and friends carers support groups. Family Rights Group offers a telephone advice line and some hands on support to assist family and friends carers to set up local groups. Funding from the Department of Children, Schools and Families' Children Young Persons and Families Grant (now known as the Department for Education) has enabled us to provide a telephone support line for carers interested in establishing local relative support groups, hands on support in assisting six new local groups to be established and to run fun days enabling children to have a good time whilst their relative carers meet others in a similar situation to themselves.

(2) Featherstone B (2009) 'Evaluation of Family Rights Group Advocacy Service 2006-9'
(<http://www.frg.org.uk/pdfs/Adv%20eval%202009.pdf>)

