



Annual Report and Review 2006

What is included in this report?

The accounts included in this report relate to the fiscal year April 2005 to March 2006. The events described in the report cover the period September 2004- September 2006, although the focus of the report is upon the activities of the last 12 months.

1. Chair's Introduction
2. Tribute to Alison Richards
3. Chief Executive's Report
4. Accounts and Treasurer's Report
5. List of Staff
6. Members of the Management Committee



Rosemary Jones,
Chair, Family Rights
Group management
committee
September 2006

Introduction by Chair of Trustees

The period covered by this report has been very significant in the history of Family Rights Group.

- Cathy Ashley joined us in March 2004 as Chief Executive, succeeding Robert Tapsfield who left to go to Fostering Network. Cathy has made an impressive and energetic contribution, working in a very effective partnership with Bridget Lindley who was promoted to the new post of Deputy Chief Executive and Principal Legal Adviser.
- Thirty years of our work was celebrated with a successful event at the Barbican.
- A much-loved colleague and legal adviser, Alison Richards, died after a spirited and dignified battle with cancer.
- We have overcome difficult financial challenges, secured funding for new projects and the development of existing services, and have produced a five-year business plan to support us to become a more sustainable organisation..
- We have successfully recruited five excellent new trustees and we welcome talented new members of staff who have joined us.

The core work of Family Rights Group has continued to flourish regardless of the obstacles in its way. The management team, comprising Cathy Ashley, Bridget Lindley, Steve Caldwell and Sue Murray, and all the permanent and sessional staff have performed magnificently: the volume of work they continue to get through is phenomenal and their steadfast commitment to families has meant that Family Rights Group has continued to be a significant voice on behalf of those whose lives are affected by the policies and professional practice of social care agencies in contact with children in need and their families.

Members of the management committee have played an important part and I would like to thank Elwyn Owens for supporting me to make decisions that have helped lay sound foundations for the future of Family Rights Group. Some members of the committee have left us during this period. On behalf of the organisation, I would like to offer my particular thanks to Susannah Walker, who stood down following her appointment as a judge, after five years as a very committed and active member of the management board, and also to Ben Freeman, our former Treasurer and Ronny Flynn, our former Vice Chair both of whom stepped down due to work commitments. We welcome the unique and valued input that our new trustees, Charles Lambrick, Elizabeth Monck, Nigel Priestley and Clio Whittaker bring, and are delighted that another new recruit, Ray Harding, has taken on the role of Treasurer.



Alison Richards

Alison Richards

30 January 1961 – 18 September 2005

In 2005 a wonderful, long-standing member of our staff team, Alison Richards, became critically ill with lung cancer. Alison showed exceptional bravery and determination in tackling her illness. Very sadly, she died on Sunday, 18 September 2005. I know that while Alison's presence is very much missed, her work, in particular in respect of family and friends care, has had a lasting impact on individual family members and on government policy. We are deeply committed to taking this work forward.

In January 2006, Family Rights Group held the inaugural Alison Richards Memorial Seminar which will become an annual event. The theme of the seminar was 'Contact after adoption', with Dr Elsbeth Neil (University of East Anglia) and Janet Digby Baker (who runs a contact centre and fostering agency) as the speakers. The seminar was well attended and included a moving tribute to Alison. It was attended by Alison's husband and sister, as well as many who had the pleasure of having worked with Alison. The second annual Alison Richards Memorial Seminar will be held on 10th January 2007 on the topical subject of 'The Human Rights Act and childcare law'.

Cathy Ashley
September 2006

A tribute to Alison by Angela Price. Angela is a trustee and a former Chair of the management committee. She worked closely with Alison and she knew her well.

"Alison first came to FRG in 1993 in a part-time role to reinvigorate our advocacy service. She developed the role so that what she heard on the phone and in letters from distressed families started to have a major impact on the policy work that was taken forward. She was key to starting FRG's work to improve social care services for black and minority ethnic families and children and, later, was the pivotal force behind FRG's work to improve recognition of, and support to, grandparents who care for their grandchildren. Alison's commitment to families was evident from the day she set foot in FRG's offices: she was organised, competent, and didn't take no for an answer. She put her legal skills to good use, and used a whole array of professional and personal skills to improve outcomes for families and their children.

"Alison is author and co-author of many publications, including *Overcoming the Obstacles*, *Second Time Around*, and *Funding Family and Friends Care*. The last event I was involved in with Alison was when I chaired the conference and launch of *Here we go Again* and Anne Morgan's *Survival Guide for Friends and Carers*. The audience comprised mostly grandparent carers who had attended the previous meeting at the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Trust in 2001, when Alison first started the project, *Second Time Around*. Only then they were sad and down in heart. But on that day, 25 November 2004, as the conference was coming to the end, I looked around and noticed how happy and smiling people were and I remarked to Alison that that was because of the hope and help that she and FRG, through her hard work, had achieved for families. Alison has left a wonderful legacy.

"Fly high my friend in the sky, until we meet again."

Angela Price



Cathy Ashley

Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive, writes:

A big thank you is due to all those working for, and involved with, Family Rights Group.

We can be proud of our successes over the last two years. The going hasn't always been smooth. We have had to wrestle with a financial shortfall whilst simultaneously trying to put in place measures to ensure the organisation's longer term sustainability - heavy workloads have fallen on our small staff group. Yet despite these difficulties the organisation has achieved so much in the last two years, and I am extremely optimistic for the future. Our commitment to support children and families remains as strong today as it did 31 years ago when the organisation was formed. Alongside our dedicated staff team, we are once again recruiting to new posts, and have an increasing number of skilled sessional advisers and consultants working for us, supported by volunteers and our trustees. We have recently secured funding to develop our advice and advocacy services, and our business plan provides us with a direction to keep Family Rights Group on a sustainable footing. It is a real pleasure to work for Family Rights Group.

Achievements

Family Rights Group can be rightly proud of our recent achievements.

- Our advice service is now supporting more family members than in any year previously – around 2,500 people who contacted our advice service in the last year received help.¹
- We advocated for over 160 families during the last year.
- There have been 32,000 visitors to the main page of our website in the last 12 months. The numbers are up by over a third from the previous year and are more than double the numbers who visited the site in 2003-4 (an increase of 111%).²
- New training courses have been designed, the majority of which have been fully booked.
- A five-year business plan has been drawn up, with the management committee heavily involved in the development of the plan.
- We have continued to get press coverage highlighting the need for effective support for families and we have attended meetings with ministers, civil servants and other key decisions-makers to press the case for improvements in child welfare policy and practice.

The rest of this report sets out in more detail the work we have undertaken over the last two years, and highlights some of the plans and objectives for the year ahead.

Celebration of 30 years

The 30th anniversary celebration event was attended by more than 100 people at the Barbican in December 2004. It was a wonderful opportunity for many people who have been involved in different ways with Family Rights Group to reflect on the many successes there have been over the last 30 years that have transformed the experiences of children and their families.



Rosemary Jones and Angela Price



Maggie Rae and Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP

1 Figures are for the period 1 September 05-31 August 06

2 All figures are for the period September to 31st August

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. Many families find their voice is unheard when they seek help in addressing their child's unmet and, at times, undiagnosed needs. While progress has been achieved in certain areas of social policy, new challenges have emerged.

Family Rights Group is continuing to campaign for further reforms to improve the lives of children and their families, including:

- A right to an accurate assessment for support services for any child who is potentially in need, drawing on specialist advice as necessary.
- A right to independent advice and advocacy for all families who become involved with local authority social care services, so that children, parents and wider family members are able to have a clearer understanding of the processes in which they are involved, and greater ownership of decisions being made about their lives. A family group conference is an independently facilitated meeting at which family members and friends draw up a plan for the child's welfare.
- A right to a family group conference (meeting) early in the process of any child welfare or protection case, in order that social services may draw upon the strengths of the wider family and friends network to meet the child's needs wherever possible.
- Greater financial support for family and friends carers who take on the care of children who cannot remain with their parents.

We have pressed our campaign agenda at meetings with ministers and civil servants. We participated in, and made a presentation to, the stakeholder group of the Review of Child Care Proceedings conducted by the DCA/DfES, which subsequently made recommendations about family group conferences and family advice and advocacy before care proceedings are issued. We have attended All Party Parliamentary Groups, given interviews and written articles in the press, and we have drafted amendments to legislation, and worked in partnership with other organisations in order to get our message across, including:

● Family Policy Alliance

Family Rights Group, alongside Parentline Plus and Family Welfare Association, is a leading member of the Family Policy Alliance campaigning about policies that affect families. In October 2005, Meg Hillier MP hosted a launch at the House of Commons of the Family Policy Alliance's toolkit on how to involve parents in service developments and a policy brief setting out recommendations to improve the lives of vulnerable children and their families.

The Nuffield Foundation and Noel Buxton have supported this work.

● **Promoting Family and Friends care**

In the run up to the 2005 General Election we drew up a Grandparents Manifesto³ in conjunction with Grandparents Plus and Grandparents Association. Launched at the All Party Parliamentary Group on Grandparents and Extended Kin, the Manifesto was well covered in the local and regional press. Together with these agencies, we then developed an Agenda for Action programme⁴ which sets out in detail far-reaching changes which we collectively believe are required at local and national to improve significantly the arrangements for family and friends care in England and Wales. We have sat on the Grandparenting Working Group that was set up by the Welsh Assembly to draw up a recommended programme of action to support grandparents in Wales, including those raising grandchildren.

● **Autism Social Care Alliance**

In response to an increasing number of calls from families whose children are suffering from autism spectrum disorder about child welfare needs and concerns, we have developed links with key agencies in the field of autism (National Autistic Society, TreeHouse (Parents Autism Campaign for Education)) and Council for Disabled Children). We have recently formed with them the Autism Social Care Alliance which is in the process of developing a campaigning agenda to raise awareness amongst social care professionals about autistic spectrum condition and the needs of children and families who are affected. The Baily Thomas Charitable Fund has agreed to fund the costs of a conference which will be a platform for this campaign.

³ Available on request or can be downloaded from the family and friends carers webpage on the FRG website www.frg.org.uk

⁴ *ibid*

Advice and Advocacy Services



● The advice service

Our telephone advice service is open every weekday morning and afternoon. We also advise clients who contact us by email and by letter. Over 90% of callers are family members; the rest are social care professionals seeking specialist advice. The main issues on which families contact FRG are:

- child protection;
- placement of children through care proceedings or voluntary accommodation; and
- family support.

Feedback from families who contact us shows that the advice service is highly valued by callers. Dr Charlotte Ritchie of Oxford University, who conducted an independent evaluation of the service in autumn 2005, concluded that the service (including the written advice materials) helps callers and their families to cope, to understand their rights and to work in partnership with social care agencies. All those surveyed regarded the service as “very important”. Dr Ritchie summed up the service when she stated:

“The overriding sense was one of a well-informed, professional service that gave its users clear guidance, emotional support and the ability to pursue their rights... Family Rights Group offers an apparently unique service that is highly valued by those who have used it for its independence and knowledge base.”

The Big Lottery, The Tudor Trust, Arimathea and Calpe Trust have generously funded the advice service over the last year.

● Written Advice sheets

As well as updating our advice sheets, we have also expanded our range of advice materials by publishing new advice sheets on:

- foster care assessment aimed at relative carers;
- information about social care services for disabled parents, would-be parents and adults in a parenting role;
- special guardianship; and
- social care services users’ rights of access to records under the Data Protection Act 1998.

These advice sheets are now available on our website and feedback indicates that they are very well received both by family members and professionals alike.

Funding has been made available for these new advice sheets from DfES Section 64 grant, the Nuffield Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

● **Advocacy service**

We are piloting an advocacy service for families in London whose children are subject to child protection (Section 47 Children Act 1989) enquiries. Again the evaluation by chairs of child protection conferences and social workers, as well as families, has been overwhelmingly positive. A conference to consider the findings of the three-year pilot project is being held in September 2006.

Our advocacy work has been funded by the Big Lottery, Tudor Trust, Baring Foundation and Bridge House.

● **Legal Services Commission Quality Mark**

We have applied for our services to be awarded the quality chartermark by the Legal Services Commission.

● **BEMAAP (Black and Ethnic Minority Advice and Advocacy Project)**

To mark the culmination of this six-year project, a successful conference was held in Leicester in January 2005. The BEMAAP resource kit has been printed and widely distributed. An online database of Black and Ethnic Minority Advice and Advisory Organisations has been published on the website. Funding from the Big Lottery (Community Fund) ended in March 2005; however, relationships are being maintained with many of these community organisations through the advice and advocacy service.

Future developments of the advice and advocacy services

● **Advice service 2006 onwards**

Big Lottery funding for the advice service ended in June 2006, as did all sources of monies from the current major trusts and foundations. Following a concerted lobbying campaign, the DfES has now agreed to fund the advice service for 2006–07 and we are optimistic this funding will continue in 2007-8 while Ministers consider how they wish to take forward a national Parents Direct service. We are working closely with other voluntary parenting help line providers and the DfES to influence any proposals and in the meantime to improve the quality and capacity of the service we collectively offer to families, whilst still maintaining our independence.

● **Advocacy service 2006 onwards**

We have been successful in securing funding from the Big Lottery and City Parochial to develop our advocacy service. These grants will enable the advocacy service to focus its face-to-face work with families in London on those who are most at risk of having their children removed, including parents with learning difficulties to ensure they are well supported and have a full understanding of the processes in which they are involved. Other families in England and Wales who contact us will receive advocacy support through our expanded self-advocacy (drafting letters for clients) and indirect advocacy work (pursuing cases through phone calls to the relevant social care agency etc). National family advocacy standards will be developed, in partnership with other key stakeholders.

We have been successful in our bid to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund to develop our advice and advocacy work with asylum-seeker families who have child welfare needs or concerns.



Children and carers enjoying a fun day

Family and Friends Care

● **Family and friends carers webpage**

Family members raising children who cannot live with their parents often receive little, if any, support from the state, and surveys show many feel extremely isolated. The family and friends carers webpage is extremely popular with over 15000 unique hits since its launch, and over 700 people registered on the electronic discussion board, with new postings most days. In addition to Alison Richards' considerable contribution, the success of the discussion board is in large measure due to trustee, Robin Derriman, providing informative and supportive contributions, and to the guidance of our staff. Further developments to the website are planned over the winter.



● **Survival Guide for Family and Friends Carers**

This popular guide was launched at a successful conference in November 2004.

● **Grandparents carers resource pack (entitled Here We Go Again)**

This extensive resource pack contains eight sections addressing key issues which affect grandparents raising their grandchildren, including dealing with social services, financial support and children's educational needs.



● **Strengthening Families Fund project**

We heard in July 2005 that our bid to the DfES Strengthening Families Fund was successful. This project will enable us to provide information, advice and support for all family and friends carers, and those working with such carers. In June 2006, a very successful fun day was organized at a theme park for children and their family and friends carers in the Milton Keynes area. This October we will be publishing Wider Families Matters – a guide for family and friends carers (which updates and extends information provided in our popular Second Time Around Guide).



Family Rights Group's family group conference team.

Family Group Conferences

● **Family group conference reader and toolkit**

A good practice toolkit is currently being produced to inform new and developing family group conference (FGC) projects. It will explore key issues when setting up a project and include detailed practice guidance on running and maintaining a project and will set out the legislative framework for FGCs in England and Wales. It will consider how FGCs can be used to address different issues, including child protection, school exclusions, youth offending and adult mental health. The toolkit is accompanied by a reader, entitled *Family Group Conferencing - Where Next? Policies and Practices For The Future*, which will explore the context of FGCs in more depth and evaluate the latest research evidence. This work has been funded by DfES Section 64 monies, with the National Assembly for Wales funding a Welsh translation of the toolkit. The publications will be launched in Wales in October and at a conference in England in November 2006.

● **Network and international conference**

We continue to facilitate the FGC network, holding quarterly meetings. We were one of the host partners of a successful international restorative communities' conference, organised by the American International Institute for Restorative Practice, which took place in Manchester in November 2005.

Future FGC developments

● **Accreditation of family group co-ordinators**

Jointly with a number of FGC projects and organisations and with academic institutions, we are exploring the possibility of an accredited diploma for family group conference co-ordinators.

● **Supporting black and minority ethnic children and families**

We successfully applied for Big Lottery London funding to increase the access, availability and take-up of FGC services among black and minority ethnic families. The project started in April 2006 and an important aspect of the work is supporting two community black and minority ethnic family support organisations, Claudia Jones and Hopscotch Asian Women's Centre to develop FGC services.

Projects



Nezry Jamil, a young father speaks out

Photos from our Fathers Matter conference



The Rt Hon Hilary Armstrong (Minister for Social Exclusion)



Professor Michael Lamb

● **Fathers Matter project**

This project has examined the obstacles to the engagement of fathers whose children are involved with social care agencies, in decisions about and the care of their children. A seminar and major conference reporting on the project's findings was held in 2006. We have now successfully obtained a further round of funding from the Parenting Fund to develop this work further. This will include improving practice on the ground by supporting fathers to influence social work teaching, developing and running a training course in conjunction with Fathers Direct and working in depth with two local authorities.

● **Poverty project**

We have been working with anti-poverty organisation ATD Fourth World and the Royal Holloway, University of London to support families and to train social workers and professionals in the social care field about the impact of poverty. A final report has been published and is available on request.

● **Special guardianship**

The Government's regulations and guidance on special guardianship came into force in December 2005. Funded by the Nuffield Foundation, Bridget Lindley has produced advice sheets for families and training materials for professionals. The reader on special guardianship, with contributions from leading experts in the field was published in spring 2006. We also now run regular training courses on special guardianship entitled: 'Special Guardianship: where does it fit in the permanence map'.

Projects in development

In response to calls from families to our advice line and partner agencies identifying similar concerns, we are exploring the development of two projects.

- We are working with partners to develop information and training materials to increase awareness among social care professionals of the support needs of children with Autism Spectrum Conditions and their families. This will underpin our campaigning work on this issue.
- With the Trust for the Study of Adolescents, a project to address violence by young people within the family is being considered.

Training and Consultancy

We have significantly expanded the number of one and two-day courses that we run and, as a result, our training and consultancy in 2005–6 has exceeded the target of £60,000 a year. Our ability to design new courses was made possible in part due to funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. We have now received approval from the Law Society and the Bar Council to accredit the legal component of our training courses for continuing professional development, which makes them attractive to members of the legal profession who are professionally required to undertake continuing professional development. Yasmin Choudhury, our events and information officer, has been instrumental in organising our successful training events and conferences.

Staffing

As this report makes clear, a number of staff have left the organisation during the year, and thanks goes to all for their contribution to Family Rights Group. The workload this year has been heavy, and has particularly fallen on Bridget Lindley whose output and support is truly extraordinary.

Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive

Accounts and Treasurer's Report

We began the fiscal year April 2005 to March 2006 facing significant financial challenges, and I first have to thank Cathy Ashley and Bridget Lindley for all their hard work and success with the fundraising this year. It is due to their efforts that we have been able to maintain our reserves at a level the trustees consider prudent to cover all eventualities and honour our commitment to Family Rights Group's greatest asset – its staff. We are particularly pleased to have secured government funds to continue to run our unique and vital helpline into 2007.

We have continued to apply long term measures to ensure financial stability, including :

- Developing and putting in place steps to implement the five-year business plan.
- Continuing to expand our training and consultancy services which rose from 8% of income in 2004–05 (£50,386) to 13% in 2005–06 (£77,782) – a level we are confident of maintaining in 2006-07
- Applying for specific project funding to a number of trusts and public bodies, ensuring that, where permissible, full cost recovery is incorporated into the bids, and if this is not forthcoming from the trusts in question, that supplementary bids are made to other funders to ensure that the real cost of the project is covered.
- Recruiting and utilising the skills of volunteers to carry out specific tasks, including, we hope, fundraising functions.
- The preparation of a business plan that pays particular attention to long-term needs and to the possibilities of developing more income-generating work.

Throughout the year Steve Caldwell, the Office and Finance Manager, has administered Family Rights Group finances with assiduous care and we are fortunate to have his skills available to us.

The following set of accounts are for approval at the Annual General Meeting held on 19 September 2006.

Raymond Harding, Treasurer
on behalf of the trustees of Family Rights Group

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2006**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2006 £	Total 2005 £
<u>Incoming resources</u>					
Voluntary income	9,356	-	-	9,356	11,232
Activities for generating funds	77,782	-	-	77,782	50,386
Investment income	9,597	-	-	9,597	9,842
	96,735	-	-	96,735	71,551
Incoming resources from charitable activities	17,311	-	475,993	493,304	530,896
Other incoming resources	2,717	-	-	2,717	958
Total incoming resources	116,763	-	475,993	592,756	603,405
<u>Resources expended</u>					
Costs of generating funds					
Costs of generating voluntary and charitable income	12,993	-	22,129	35,122	45,270
Net incoming resources available	103,770	-	453,864	557,634	558,135
Charitable expenditure					
Charitable expenditure	57,521	-	377,646	435,167	541,691
Governance costs	28,485	-	59,265	87,750	44,767
Total resources expended	98,999	-	459,040	558,039	631,728
Net incoming (outgoing) resources before transfers	17,764	-	16,953	34,717	(28,323)
Gross transfers between funds	(43,594)	-	43,594	-	-
Net (expenditure)/income for the year / Net movement in funds	(25,830)	-	60,547	34,717	(28,323)
Fund balances at 1 April 2005	208,609	4,000	(60,547)	152,062	180,385
Fund balances at 31 March 2006	182,779	4,000	-	186,779	152,062

The statement of financial activities also complies with the requirements for an income and expenditure account under the Companies Act 1985.

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 31 MARCH 2006

	2006		2005	
	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets				
Tangible assets		8,549		12,241
Current assets				
Debtors	13,120		28,567	
Cash at bank and in hand	315,949		282,070	
	<u>329,069</u>		<u>310,637</u>	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(39,168)		(31,592)	
		289,901		279,045
Net current assets		<u>298,450</u>		<u>291,286</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		(111,671)		(139,224)
Deferred income				
		<u>186,779</u>		<u>152,062</u>
Net assets				
Income funds				
Restricted funds		–		(60,547)
Unrestricted funds				
Designated funds		4,000		4,000
Other charitable funds		182,779		208,609
		<u>186,779</u>		<u>152,062</u>

STAFF (2006)



Cathy Ashley
Chief Executive



Tana Thomas
Policy Adviser



Bridget Lindley
Deputy Chief Executive and
Principal Legal Adviser



Sue Murray
Advice Advocacy Manager



Steve Caldwell
Office and
Finance Manager



Landa Udennis
Adviser and Advocate



Yasmin Choudhury
Events and
Information Officer

Andrea Hopkins
Legal Adviser



Sheila Martin
Administrator

Sandra John
Advocacy Project Officer



Deanna Edwards
Policy Adviser

Maggs Beaven
Adviser and Advocate
(retired July 2006)



Sean Haresnape
Policy Adviser

Jacinta Marron
Adviser and Advocate

David Roth
Policy Adviser

Sessional Advisers

Katrin Bain
Andrea Gill
Madeleine Henley
Pam Ledward
Susan Moore
Gary Robinson
Natalia Schiffrin
Roger Wearing

MEMBERS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Rosemary Jones (Chair)
Robin Derriman
Ray Harding (Treasurer)
Diane Jackson
Charles Lambrick
Elizabeth Monck
Elwyn Owens (Vice Chair)
Angela Price
Nigel Priestley
Rita Stringfellow
Susannah Walker (up to March 06)
Clio Whittaker



FAMILY RIGHTS GROUP
The Print House
18 Ashwin Street
London E8 3DL

Tel: 020 7923 2628
Fax: 020 7923 2683
Email: office@frg.org.uk
Website: www.frg.org.uk

Advice Line: 0800 731 1696
Advice Line Opening Hours:
Mon - Fri: 10am-12pm and
1.30pm-3.30pm