

Press Release



Immediate Release: Thursday 24 July 2008

NEW OFFICE PAVES WAY FOR BETTER SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Cafcass, the organisation that looks after children's interests in the family courts, has opened a specially designed office in Portsmouth to provide improved opportunities for interviewing families, family mediation and contact across South Hampshire.

Anthony Douglas, Cafcass Chief Executive says, "We work with children in the family courts. Whether their parents are divorcing or separating or a child is going through care proceedings - it is a stressful time for all involved. So I am really pleased that we have been able to refurbish our offices to such a high standard.

The new Portsmouth office will provide an environment better suited to delivering modern family services and opportunities for children and families to maintain contact. The project has been brought to fruition through the work of many colleagues and I would like to thank the Portsmouth team and business support colleagues, who worked tirelessly to make it happen."

The new development in Portsmouth provides quality facilities for interviewing children and families as well as improved accommodation and security for staff. The multi-purpose building is designed for modern ways of working, and includes areas for contact and managing dispute resolution. Facilities include three interviewing rooms plus a family room and were designed to meet the needs of children and families.

Service Manager, Liana Birtwhistle said, " Over the last year we worked with 885 children in Portsmouth and the surrounding area. The refurbished Cafcass office in Portsmouth is evidence of our commitment to improving the experience children and families have of using our services.

The new building has good public transport links, parking for visitors and excellent disabled access, as well as providing a modern working space for practitioners.

From our new location we will be able to work with even more local partners by utilising our own accommodation to work not only with families on site but in partnership with Local Authority Children's Services, Health professionals – and others.

The new offices are already having a positive impact on our work. We have been able to extend the range of services on offer and last week we were able

to hold our first Family Group Conference. This involved the applicant parents and their extended family and resulted in an appropriate outcome for the children concerned with the support of the whole family. This would not have been possible in the old building."

The new offices are to be formally opened tomorrow 24th July 2008 – to attend or send a photographer please contact Takki Sulaiman on 07778 419218.

Attending the opening will be local judges, solicitors and senior Local Authority officers.

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Notes for Editors:

- The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) was formed as a new service for England and Wales on 1 April 2001 as part of the Government's commitment to supporting families and children. It brought together the services previously provided by the Family Court Welfare Service, the Guardian ad Litem Services and the Children's divisions of the Official Solicitor's Office.
- Cafcass has a statutory responsibility to ensure that children and young people are put first in family proceedings, that their voices are heard, the decisions made about them by courts are in their best interests and that they and their families are supported throughout the process. We operate within the law set by Parliament and under the rules and directions of the family courts.
- Cafcass' role is to work with Children and Families in the family courts. The following list provides some examples of the types of cases we work with:-
 - Adoption (public law)
 - Care Orders (public law)
 - Emergency Protection Orders (public law)
 - Residency and contact following divorce and separation (private law)
- Cafcass is sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and is a non-departmental public body.
- For the year 2007-2008 CAF/CASS promoted the interests of 77,134 children. This does not factor in the work we do with children and their families in dispute resolution and our support of contact centres.
- Cafcass recently established a Young People's Board who have experience of our services. They advise us on matters of policy and practice.
- Cafcass' new National Standards are available for download at our new website www.cafcass.gov.uk
- For 2008-09 Cafcass is implementing a major practice improvement programme to improve the quality and consistency of frontline practice.

For further information:

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