

Channel C

The monthly staff bulletin for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

August 2018



02 Voice of the Child Conference 2018

04 Ask the expert: top tips for parents

06 Notice board

03 FJYPB year recap

05 Spotlight on...Farhana, FJYPB member

Voice of the Child Conference 2018



On 24th July 2018 the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) held a completely child-led conference promoting the resilience of children and young people in the family courts, at the Hilton in Manchester. As a member of the FJYPB, I feel very passionate about the importance of our opportunity to voice the issues that matter to young people in private or public law proceedings. I am proud to promote improvements, so proceedings do not negatively dominate our lives.

The day began with a message from Lucy Frazer, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice, (MoJ) who highlighted that sometimes children and young people involved in family proceedings may need support to become resilient. She showed recognition of how there is a diverse range of family justice practitioners. She also talked of an ongoing commitment to make sure that those working in and around the system do so with as close-knit connections as possible, in order to improve the experience for families. As the conference was centred around the voice of the child and how it is our lives being affected by the decisions that professionals may come to, we found this encouraging to hear.

Being surrounded by such inspirational individuals, it was the perfect opportunity to give them updates on the work that the FJYPB do as well as emphasise factors which we think should be prioritised going forward. We have had a 47% increase in commissions alone. Alongside this, we are currently working on some eLearning to help professionals understand the child's journey in their own proceedings. We also believe that waiting areas in contact centres and family courts could be improved and made more child-centred. Moving forward we want to work closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to help children to feel that schools are safe and secure environments and with access to reliable adults they can openly speak to about their case if required. We also want children to continuously feel included and valued in their proceedings and work with DfE may help this.

As Board members have either had their own case in the family courts or are interested in family proceedings, four of our members took a heart-felt, inspirational and brave 10 minutes to discuss their experiences. They talked about how it made them more resilient and how they dealt with stressful situation for their 'In my shoes' speeches.

Anthony Douglas, Cafcass CEO, delivered a presentation during which he placed emphasis on the child-led family justice system and how it can be more so. During the lunch break I spoke with him personally. "With the right type of help and support, children can recover from the most horrendous trauma and get on with their lives in a better place," was an inspirational quote that I picked up on. Along with Lucy Frazer I completely agree.

Other speakers also took to the stage. Outgoing President of the Family Justice Division, Sir James Munby, delivered an impassioned speech, recognising the "vital role" the FJYPB has to play in the future of the family justice system and urging us to "continue fighting."

Later in the afternoon, Edward Timpson, Cafcass Chair, said that the time has come to "create a system for children, rather than a system that children have to fit into."

As well as the 'In my shoes' sessions, we played our resilience video to the guests in which a few members spoke about what this theme meant to them. They also shared what they usually do or who they turn to at stressful times. We held the 'panel challenge' where the Board posed questions to guests from Cafcass and the judiciary, among others, on matters such as domestic abuse legalities, with audience participation. The audience also had the opportunity to attend one of four workshops which looked at resilience in a range of contexts including mental health, public law and private law cases.

Since the conference Claire, Jenn and Marie, who support the FJYPB, have received so many positive comments about the day from guests. These praised the sincerity and intelligence with which the day was put together, and its smooth-running. Compliments like these give us as young people the confidence boost to continue doing the work we are doing. We already can't wait until next year's conference!

Katie, aged 19.

FJYPB year recap

In 2017, our members completed a record-breaking number of commissions and from halfway through 2018 it doesn't look like things are slowing down. Since setting our [annual priorities](#) in January, the FJYPB has taken part in a whopping 77 commissions – that's just over two commissions per week. Wow!

It really has been an exciting year so far. Highlights have included meeting with Ofsted back in February as part of the inspection to hosting our 6th annual Voice of the Child Conference last month. Other key highlights and developments include:

- * Meeting with Lucy Frazer MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the MoJ to identify areas where we can work together.
- * Being actively involved in HMCTS Children and Young People Strategy Group meetings which aim to improve how children and young people engage and experience family courts and court services.
- * Carrying out inspections of [NACCC](#) Support Contact Centres across the North East of England to help centres and their staff improve the buildings and service they provide to children and families.
- * Continuing to build a strong relationship with Cafcass Cymru. Board members co-hosted a hugely successful annual conference for Cafcass Cymru staff back in May.

A large number of the FJYPB's commissions are from Cafcass. You may have met some of us when we've sat on interview panels to recruit new Family Court Advisers or shared our views and ideas on new tools and developments. Or when we've delivered presentations and workshops for staff development days.

We have also developed further 'top tips' for professionals. These have been hugely popular across Cafcass and beyond. As Shanti explains in her article, we've recently launched the [FJYPB's top tips for separated parents](#). We hope this can also be used as a useful tool for practitioners when working with parents and families. Alongside this, we've been working closely with the Cafcass National Improvement Service to develop and produce an interactive and educational 'voice of the child' eLearning tool for all Cafcass staff. This eLearning is now live on MySkills – [check it out!](#)

Working so closely with Cafcass teams at all levels across the country enables us to see the impact you have in ensuring the voice of the child is kept central to policy and practice. It is fantastic to know that Cafcass really listens to and values our views. But we understand that it can be challenge keeping up to date with what we're doing, the best way to use our tools and resources, as well as knowing how to commission us. So, to ensure we're able to keep up the good work, one member of Cafcass staff per service area has been nominated to be a FJYPB champion. They will introduce themselves to their teams soon, so watch this space!

We're looking forward to the challenges to come in the next four months. To keep up to date with what we're doing, please email us at FJYPB@cafcass.gov.uk or contact your local FJYPB champion. A list of champions will be made available soon.

Claire, FJYPB Team



Key Dates...September

Eid-al-Adha
(Muslim)

Roald Dahl Day

Rosh Hashana
(Jewish)

Yom Kippur (Jewish)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

FJYPB to meet with Nadhim Zahawi MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families and with new President, Sir Andrew McFarlane



This month Shanti, FJYPB member, talks about using the FJYPB's top tips for separated parents in our work and as a tool for parents and other professionals.

Q *I'm currently working with parents who, following an initially difficult separation, are now trying to navigate their co-parenting relationship while still putting their child first. I have shared the Parenting Plan and Separated Parents Information Handbook. Are there any other resources or guidance from a young person's perspective to really help them put themselves in their child's shoes and adapt their behaviour to meet the child's needs?*

A In 2018 the FJYPB updated our [top tips for separated parents](#), – written from young people's perspectives, alongside videos which were featured in the Cafcass Operating Framework. The main aim was to provide parents and practitioners with guidance on how to support children and young people through changes to their home environment, through proceedings and beyond. It's a message that we reiterate in our [national charter](#) and throughout the work we do.

We promoted these tips at our VOTC conference this year. I've reviewed them and selected the ones that you might want to consider sharing with the adults involved – although all of our tips can be helpful!

- * Don't make me feel guilty about spending time with my other parent.
- * Keep me informed about any changes to my arrangements.
- * Don't ask me to lie to professionals.
- * Remember that I might want something different to my siblings.

We also thought of some practical tips that could help guide separated parents in daily life, like:

- * Make it easy for me to take the things I need when I spend time with my other parent, such as school work, PE kits and clothes.

It's important for both practitioners and parents to focus on the matters that, although may seem trivial to adults, can actually have a big impact on children and young people.

These tips are a simple but important resource that can also be shared with staff from different organisations. This is not only to ensure their work is child focused, but also so they can pass the resource onto any parents or carers who may benefit from a reminder to focus on the voice of the child during proceedings.

Our full list of top tips can be found on the [FJYPB page of the Cafcass website](#).

Spotlight on...

This month, Channel C speaks to Farhana, a member of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB). Farhana tells us about her ambitions for the future, her studies and her favourite things about being on the FJYPB.

NAME: **Farhana**

ROLE: **FJYPB member**

WITH CAFCASS SINCE: **2013**



At 18, Farhana is one of the longest serving members of the Family Justice Young People's Board. She has been with the Board since 2013 and remembers how she joined at just 14 years old. "I was given a leaflet about the FJYPB by my legal guardian at the time, and I remember looking at it and feeling really inspired to take part." When she arrived for her interview, she felt a little intimidated as the importance of FJYPB became clearer to her, but she was soon put at ease. "Everyone on the Board was so friendly and welcoming, they felt like one big family," says Farhana.

"The first thing I wanted to change was the proceedings process – when going through a case the child involved has to keep sharing their story with so many different people. It can be a scary and exhausting process," she explains. Farhana wanted to limit the number of professionals each child saw during proceedings and ensure that each practitioner always listened to their concerns. Farhana also recalls the new 26 week limit for public law proceedings being introduced in April 2014. "It was a great first step in the right direction," Farhana explains excitedly, "there is still much to be done but stuff like this is encouraging."

One of the best things about Farhana's FJYPB experience has been developing a support network of her own. "I love my friends from school, but they don't always understand what's going on with me. The friends I've made through being on the FJYPB are great – they get it without me having to explain myself. It's great to have this kind of trustworthy community." She also

reflects on how her involvement with the FJYPB has helped develop her confidence, "During one of our conferences, I decided to get up on stage and share my personal story. It was really hard and I broke down on stage in the end. But it was also amazing. Having important people like judges and social workers telling me they were proud of how far I've come really boosted my confidence," she smiles.

Her favourite experience of all, however, has been taking on commissions and going to children's contact centres to assess them and make child friendly recommendations. "It was such a privilege, and I felt so important. It's so nice that we are able to offer comments from the child's perspective that the adults really take on board and implement our advice." She recalls a particular experience when she and her young sister visited a contact centre in Portsmouth that she had attended some years before. "All the staff remembered my name! It was a special day."

Most importantly, perhaps, Farhana feels that her time on the Board has inspired her future career aspirations. "I really want to be a solicitor, specialising in family law." She's off to university in September to start the journey to making her dream a reality and has the FJYPB to thank for it. "Without my experiences on the Board, working on the projects and doing the conferences, I don't think I would've ever thought a legal career could be something I would achieve." Now, with her experiences and passion behind her, she feels hopeful about the future.

Notice board

eLearning

Over the past year, FJYPB members has been working closely with the Cafcass NIS team to develop and produce an interactive and educational 'voice of the child' e-learning tool for all Cafcass staff. The e-learning not only includes information about the FJYPB but also explores a number of 'real life' scenarios to challenge how good practice can be applied.

The aim of this eLearning is to influence working practice of professionals working with across Cafcass to ensure that the service they deliver is child inclusive, encourages participation and is reflective of the rights of the children and young people they are working with.

The e-learning is now available to all staff. New starters will be encouraged to complete it as part of their induction. [Please check it out!](#)

Glossary

We have created our own useful [glossary](#) explaining some of the words and phrases which children and young people may hear about during a family court case and may have difficulty understanding.

We are currently working to update our glossary and would love to hear from you about any more terms we can include. You can email your ideas to FJYPB@cafcass.gov.uk.

Highlights from the VOTC 2018 eLearning

“Powerful, moving and heart-wrenching account of the brave young people who have changed adversity into opportunity. Hats off to you – the real heroes.”

“Fabulous conference as always – I repeat the comment I made two years ago that these conferences are the best I have ever attended as they are interactive and always child focused.”

“Good combination of inputs from professionals but clearly led and facilitated by the children and young people. Thought it was a great topic and a great platform of honest and real inputs from all.”

“Would love to know more about FJYPB's work. This conference is the future!”

