

Family Rights Group Advice Service Evaluation and Impact Report, 2016

1. Family Rights Group's Advice service

Family Rights Group runs a unique, free, personalised child welfare legal advice service for families involved with children's services. Our independent, national advice service is staffed by qualified social workers, lawyers and other similarly experienced professionals.

FRG advises parents whose children are in need, at risk or in the care system and we support relatives and friends to be assessed as potential carers and get help to raise children who cannot remain at home. Many of our clients are frightened and overwhelmed. We help them draw on their strengths and resources, get support to prevent problems escalating, face up to any child protection concerns, understand their rights and options, make informed decisions and navigate local authority and court systems. We support constructive engagement with social workers to help keep children safe within their family and avoid unnecessary care proceedings.

Family Rights Group answered over 6000 calls, advising 5588 families in England and Wales during the financial year 2015/16¹. Our advice service is primarily used by parents, who made up 68% of categorised callers in 2015/16. Other relatives and friends comprised 30% of those advised. These are primarily kinship carers, such as grandparents and older siblings who are *raising children unable to live with their parents* or family and friends who wish to take on a child in this situation.

Practitioners comprise the remaining 3% of those we advised.

A previous independent evaluation ([Featherstone et al, 2012²](#)) found:

- 71% of parents said our advice helped them immediately understand how they could improve things for their child;
- 83% of kinship carers³ said our advice and advocacy helped the family to stay together.

¹ Some callers ring back as their case develops, requiring further advice

² All previous evaluations are published on FRG's website: <http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/our-impact>

³ Kinship carers are also sometimes referred to as family and friends carers

To follow up the 2012 evaluation, FRG worked with New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)⁴ in 2015 to establish a framework that would enable us to conduct impact evaluations regularly including measuring economic outcomes.

2. Evaluation methodology

A Theory of Change for the Advice service was developed and is summarised at Appendix 1. It provides the rationale for survey questionnaires devised by NPC. The surveys enable FRG to collect data that measures the impact of FRG's advice line. Appendix 2 provides a summary of the Economic Model used to calculate the economic impact of the service.

A surveys of service users was conducted 1 – 5 days after they rang the FRG advice line (T1) and a further survey four to six months following their call (T2). The surveys were conducted from August 2015 until February 2016.

Survey T1

We began this survey in August 2015. Out of 246 callers who agreed to be contacted for research purposes, a total of 78 callers completed the survey resulting in a response rate of 32% (the calls concerned 125 children). The survey could be completed online or by phone but the majority were completed online (90%). This survey was primarily to get feedback from service users and assess the immediate impact of the advice they had received.

Survey T2

This survey of callers four to six months after they had rung the advice line was primarily to assess medium term outcomes for the child and family and the level of FRG's contribution to any changes. It was conducted from October 2015 to February 2016, 52 responses (concerning 88 children) were obtained out of 301 attempted contacts giving a response rate of 16%. Similarly to Survey T1, survey T2 could be

⁴ www.thinknpc.org

completed online or by phone and the majority of them were completed online (97%).⁵

The 32% response rate for Survey T1 and the sample size (78) reflect the fact that many callers were not available to give us feedback, presumably because they were preoccupied with their current challenging circumstances.

The lower response rate for Survey T2 (16%) and the sample size (52) might be due to the nature of the FRG advice line service which is for the most part a one off service. The time gap, although important to pick up longer-term impact, is problematic in terms of response rates for the T2 survey, because callers may be in situations of flux and even chaos, so their telephone numbers and email addresses may well change from the time that they first rang making it impossible for FRG to contact them for follow up feedback. Moreover, some may have moved on emotionally and do not wish to revisit a very traumatic time in their lives. Nonetheless FRG hopes to undertake further surveys, giving ourselves more time to contact more callers so as to try to increase response rates and numbers.

We recognise that the sample sizes are relatively small, and that as a consequence the results presented below are indicative. However, they are consistent with previous evaluations and measures⁶, which increases our confidence in the results.

Economic impact

In order to estimate the economic impact of FRG's advice line, a model was developed by NPC which estimates a range of cost and benefit parameters, based on a range of assumptions and the survey data. The model provides estimates of the proportion of cases where the FRG advice line reduces local authority costs by averting the need for long term or more intensive statutory involvement, including avoiding children unnecessarily entering the care system. The model estimates what these savings might be. The data presented is indicative, as more accurate

⁵ Note that only a small minority of T2 respondents had also responded to the first survey

⁶ See <http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/our-impact>

estimates would require local authority data on individual case outcomes and costs which is not available.

Measures

The long term goal of FRG's Advice Service is to keep children safe and enable them to thrive within their family network. A secondary goal is to reduce or to make more effective statutory involvement with the child and family. The surveys measured how effective the service is in working to achieve those goals.

NPC also recommended gathering data on user satisfaction and feedback with the service. They also recommended collecting data on demographic characteristics of respondents so as to compare with all users of the advice line.

3. Summary of findings

For the first survey, which took place one to five days after the call to FRG:

- The 78 respondents were calling about 125 children, including babies (5% of respondents), one to five year olds (26%), six to twelve year olds (49%) and thirteen to nineteen year olds (20%);
- 95% of callers found the service helpful or very helpful;
- 85% of respondents felt that they had a better understanding of what they had to do as a result of the call to FRG;
- 80% felt more confident to have their say with the social worker/children's service as a result of the call with FRG;⁷⁸
- 78% of respondents felt that they understood the law better as a result of the call with FRG;⁹
- 77% felt that they understood their rights and responsibilities better as a result of the call with FRG;¹⁰

⁷ Note that all figures exclude those who replied that the question was not applicable; we have provided information on the percentage who answered that the question was not applicable in footnotes

⁸ 6% replied the question was not applicable.

⁹ 9% replied the question was not applicable.

¹⁰ 8% replied the question was not applicable

- The majority (62%) felt that the call with FRG helped them to understand the concerns of the social worker;¹¹
- 74% felt that the call with FRG improved their understanding of children's services procedures;¹²
- We asked respondents how they were coping before the call to FRG; only 16% felt they were coping quite well or very well; after the call 64% felt they were coping quite well, or very well; and
- 84% felt that it was the call with FRG that helped them to cope.¹³

In the second survey of people who had used the service four to six months previously we checked where the child was living at the time of the call and where the child was living at the time of the completion of the survey. Six fewer children were in unrelated care by the time of the follow up survey, one of whom had returned to their parents and five of whom were now living with the wider family network.

In addition:

- 54% felt better able to work with the social worker/children's services since the call with FRG;¹⁴
- 44% agreed that the call with FRG helped them gain a better understanding of the concerns of the social worker;¹⁵
- 80% agreed that they had a better understanding of what they had to do as a result of the call to FRG;¹⁶
- 74% agreed that they had a better understanding of children's services procedures as a result of the call to FRG;¹⁷
- 77% agreed they felt more confident to have their say with the social worker/children's services as a result of the call to FRG;¹⁸
- 44% agreed that the support they received from FRG made a positive difference to the local authority plan and/or services for their child/children.¹⁹

¹¹ 23% replied the question was not applicable

¹² 12% replied the question was not applicable

¹³ 4% replied the question was not applicable

¹⁴ 20% replied the question was not applicable

¹⁵ 16% replied the question was not applicable

¹⁶ 2% replied the question was not applicable

¹⁷ 8% replied the question was not applicable

¹⁸ 8% replied the question was not applicable

¹⁹ 20% replied the question was not applicable

The economic model estimates both care costs avoided and savings on social worker time, and the findings suggest that the service saves at least £8 to £48 for every £1 invested, with a mean of £28. The estimates and assumptions used are based on available data and published evidence. However there are some uncertainties hence the range for the cost estimate is wide. Nevertheless, the most conservative estimates still suggest a substantially high return on investment. The advice service is currently funded by the Department of Education with a grant of £324,000 in 2015/16. Using the lower estimate means the Advice line in 2015/16 has saved the public purse approximately £2 million; using the mean figure it has saved the public purse approximately £9 million and using the higher estimate of the range, the advice line saved approximately £15 million.

4. The survey respondents

T1 Respondents

Survey respondents to the T1 survey had a range of relationships with children, reflecting the aim and reach of the service:

Table 1 T1 survey respondents' relationship to the children they were calling about

	Response Percent
Mothers, including stepmothers	47%
Father, incl stepfathers	15%
Grandparent	19%
Other relatives, (e.g. Aunt/Uncle)	14%
Family friends	3%
Foster carer	1%
Base number 78	

The relationships of the survey respondents to the children they are calling about is broadly reflective of all callers to our advice line.

The ethnic background of respondents to T1 was in line with the background of all those who use the advice service. The majority of respondents to T1 said they were white (81%; roughly the same as the 80% of all callers to the advice line); 10% were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, (for all callers to the line this is also 10%), 5% were Asian/Asian British, (for all callers to the line this is 6%); 3% from mixed or multiple ethnic groups (for all callers to the line this is also 3%) and 1% from other ethnic groups (for callers to the service this is also 1%).

T2 Respondents

In this survey respondents were far more likely to be kinship carers (58% grandparents, wider family and family friend than parents and a higher proportion were White (87%), with 4% Black/Black British and 2% Asian/Asian British. We think that the higher response rate from kinship carers is likely to reflect the fact that their situation is more stable, so that we have a better chance of making contact with them and they are more inclined to respond. The 52 respondents were caring for 88 children.

5. User satisfaction

95% of respondents to the T1 survey found the service helpful; 68% found it very helpful and 27% quite helpful. Only 1 respondent found it unhelpful (Table 2).

Table 2: Service users' level of satisfaction of the advice line (%)

How helpful or unhelpful did you find the advice line?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Very helpful	68%
Quite helpful	27%

Neither helpful nor unhelpful	4%
Quite unhelpful	1%
Very unhelpful	0%
Base	78

6. Immediate Impact

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 set out the responses to impact questions asked of callers one to four days after they had contacted FRG's advice line.

Table 3 Impact of call to advice line on service users at T1

Answer Options	I have a better understanding of what I have to do as a result of the call to FRG	I feel more confident to have my say with the social worker/children's service as a result of the call with FRG	I understand the law better as a result of the support received from FRG	I understand my rights and responsibilities better as a result of the support received by FRG
Strongly agree	58%	42%	44%	46%
Agree	27%	38%	34%	31%
Neither agree nor disagree	9%	12%	14%	15%
Disagree	3%	1%	4%	4%
Strongly disagree	4%	5%	4%	4%
Base	78	73	71	72

The majority (62%), where applicable, felt that the call with FRG helped them to understand the concerns of the social worker where this was applicable (in 77% of cases). 30% strongly agreed with this statement, and 32% agreed with it²⁰ (Table 4).

74%, where applicable, felt that the call with FRG improved their understanding of children’s services procedures²¹ (Table 4).

Table 4: Callers’ understanding of the role and concerns of social worker and of local authority children’s services, following the call to FRG’s advice line at T1

Answer Options	The call with FRG helped me to understand the concerns of the social worker	I have a better understanding of children’s services procedures as a result of the call with FRG
Strongly agree	30%	35%
Agree	32%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%	14%
Disagree	13%	6%
Strongly disagree	7%	6%
<i>Base</i>	60	69

Table 5 Improved coping, T1

²⁰ The question was not applicable to 23% of respondents.

²¹The question was not applicable to 12% of respondents.

We asked respondents how they were coping before the call to FRG, only 16% felt they were coping quite well or very well. After the call, 64% felt they were coping quite well or very well.

Answer Options	How would you say you were coping BEFORE your call with FRG?	How about AFTER your call?
Very well	4%	24%
Quite well	12%	40%
OK	31%	27%
Not very	36%	4%
Not at all	18%	5%
<i>Base</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>78</i>

The impact of FRG advice on the callers' ability to cope is also confirmed in the following question to which 84% answered that they felt that it was the call with FRG that helped them cope, 35% to a great extent and 46% to some extent²²:

Table 6 Extent FRG helped respondents to cope, T1

To what extent would you say the call with FRG influenced your ability to cope?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
A great extent	35%

²² 4% replied the question was not applicable

To some extent	46%
Not sure	9%
Not much	1%
Not at all	5%
Base	75

We offered a space for respondents to add their own comments. Typical comments were:

Absolutely invaluable clear advice. The advisor was so friendly and easy to speak to. I feel calmer after speaking with her.

Thank you very much for talking at a time of great stress and helping me understand better and feel more able to cope with the situation.

(Adviser) was very helpful and didn't rush me, she was understanding but very honest. I was thinking of not seeing my two younger children anymore before I spoke to (adviser) but walking away isn't the answer even though I know it's just as hard seeing them right now.

The lady I spoke to was (name), and I would just like to say she helped me tremendously. Her professional, supportive and sensitive manner helped me feel comfortable and more confident with my dealings with children's services, and my rights regarding my situation.

Where a person found the call less helpful this sometimes related to not obtaining the information they were expecting, or finding a staff member not being as emotionally supportive as they would have liked, or to the difficulty of getting through to the service:

Need more people answering the phones. I've managed to get through twice, on the first occasion I was helped sympathetically with gentleness and support but I couldn't

get more information to help me. the second time i called the response was a different style that was direct and non nurturing and explained the rights of the social workers and my daughter and not mine...the situation is difficult and I have little support because of my daughter age but a gentler and direct approach would have been appreciated. I accepted the advice. I need support with the system and need to email my questions. An email service should definitely be made available again.

7. Medium Term Impact

The T2 survey four to six months after the call, provided an opportunity to assess the medium term impact of the call to FRG’s advice line.

Table 7 Where the child was and is now living, T2

	When you called FRG, where was the child/were the children living?		Where is the child/are the children living now?	
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count	Response Percent	Response Count
Mother and/or father	40%	21	42%	22
Wider family or friends network	29%	15	37%	19
Non family and friends foster care, residential care and adoption	31%	16	21%	11
<i>Base</i>		52		52

At the time of the call to FRG, 40% of respondents to the follow up survey reported that the child was living with mother and/or father, 29% with the wider family or

friends' network and 31% in unrelated care. By the time of the follow up survey (4 to 6 months after their call to FRG), 42% of children were living with their mother and/or father, 37% with the wider family or friends' network and 21% were in unrelated care. In numbers this is 5 fewer children in unrelated care, 1 of whom returned to their parents and 4 of whom went to the wider family network.

Did FRG's advice line help to keep children within or return children to their parents or wider family?

Where the child is now living with their parents/a parent, we asked T2 respondents if FRG had helped to achieve this. Of the 12 respondents who answered, 4 felt that the call to FRG helped the child stay or be reunited with the mother and/or father to a great extent, 5 felt it helped to some extent and 3 felt it had not really helped.

Where the child is now living with wider family or friends, we asked T2 respondents if FRG had helped to achieve this. Of the 13 respondents who answered, 4 felt that the call with FRG helped the child stay or be placed with that family member or friend to a great extent, 4 felt it helped to some extent and 5 felt it had not really helped.

Working with social workers

Respondents at T2 were asked if they have felt better able to work with the social worker/children's services since the call with FRG. 51 responded: where applicable, 32% strongly agreed²³ and 22% agreed that they had felt better able; 22% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7% disagreed and 17% strongly disagreed.

Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed made additional comments that explained why:

The advice received was exactly what I required but my local authority are resisting my application for fostering assessment and have rejected my appeal.

²³ The economic model assumes that those who strongly agreed with the statement will save social workers' time. See Appendix 2 for details of how the savings of social worker time have been calculated.

Very friendly, very understanding, helpful as far as they could be. Still haven't got my children home, I need to go back to court and fight the LA but I do not qualify for legal aid now the court proceedings have finished.

FRG clarified some things for me, but children's services keep changing the goal posts.

Understanding the concerns of the social worker, T2

Respondents were asked if the call with FRG helped them gain a better understanding of the concerns of the social worker; 51 answered this question and of those who felt that the question was relevant (84%), 16% strongly agreed that it had and a further 28% agreed. 23% neither agreed nor disagreed while 28% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed.

Felt better informed and able to think of options

Huge difference I can't thank them enough. They informed me of my rights and how to challenge the appalling service we were getting from the disabled children's team and get them to agree to meet my son's needs.

Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed made additional comments that suggest that they have been unable to work with the social workers:

Things are the same at the moment, Social Services had their goal, to have the baby adopted

Made me feel better, the issue was resolved but not to our satisfaction. I was worried about how my daughter in law looked after the children who were growing up in a filthy house with no food and no beddings. I felt I could not say anything to my son as he would take it as an attack. I decided to contact the social services for advice but because young children were involved they reacted drastically and got involved immediately, my son never forgave me for contacting them, i just wanted some advice and did not expect them to be involved. Now my son refuses to see me

and it has made my contact with the children very difficult, I can have the 2 oldest ones at home but I have not seen the 2 youngest ones for a while. I feel social services has made it worse than before as they are not getting involved anymore and I can't monitor the state of the house and the level of care of my grandchildren.

Coping with a child going into care, T2

Respondents who said the children they were calling about were now in the care system were asked about how they were coping with their child going into care. Of the 11 respondents who answered 4 felt that the call with FRG was very helpful in enabling them to cope, 6 felt it was quite helpful and 1 felt it was neither helpful nor unhelpful.

Helping service users to make informed choices, T2

- 51 answered of whom, where relevant, 45% strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of what they had to do as a result of the call to FRG, while 33% agreed, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, 6% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed²⁴
- 51 answered of whom, where relevant, 35% strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of children's services procedures as a result of the call to FRG, and a further 31% agreed. 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, 12% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed²⁵.
- 51 answered of whom, where relevant, 41% strongly agreed they felt more confident to have their say with the social worker/children's services as a result of the call to FRG, a further 29% agreed, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed and 12% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed.²⁶

Impact on the local authority plan and/or services, T2

²⁴ This was not relevant to 2% of respondents.

²⁵ This was not relevant to 10% of respondents.

²⁶ This was not relevant to 8% of respondents.

51 answered, where relevant 25% strongly agreed that the support they received from FRG made a positive difference to the local authority plan and/or services for their child/children, a further 10% agreed, 27% neither agreed nor disagreed, 14% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed²⁷.

Well, she hasn't been taken away..! Huge.

FRG gave me a good sense of direction, I used the paperwork adviser sent me to fight for my rights. The call made a difference to what I knew and made my fight easier.

On approaching the meeting, the advice on conduct was illuminating.

Further feedback from T2 respondents

Respondents to the follow up survey were asked to comment in a free text box. Typical comments are provided below and illustrate both the difference the service can make and the frustrations service users feel at its limitations:

I am Pakistani and I don't understand the law, FRG was the only one to tell me the how and why, if I am here today with my 4 children, it's thanks to the adviser.

Not a lot of difference to the children, but made a difference to me and my wife, we understood the procedure better

Not sure yet, bit promising, might be considered as the baby's carer.

Adoption would have been the option so I am glad I contacted you on the advice of CAB

Huge - the child was a friend of the family and she was left with me by social services, unpaid and unsupported. After contacting FRG, I realised this was illegal

²⁷ This was not relevant to 20% of respondents.

*FRG gave me a lot of information and gave me an understanding of how to proceed
It gave me the confidence so I could put my case forward to take on the children
myself if they did not go back to their parents.*

*The advice received was exactly what I required but my local authority are resisting
my application for fostering assessment and have rejected my appeal.*

*I felt that FRG does not consider that social workers do not always play by the rules!
I have not been able to see my grandchildren for the past 3 years and have now
been told I cannot even have a photograph! I have had no communication with
Social Workers other than their negative replies to my letters sent to them requesting
contact. There should be someone who can intervene when it's clear that contact
has been stopped by social workers who blame the child, stating it's the eldest
grandchild who doesn't want contact/photos given for herself or her younger brother!
An advocate was refused! The IRO failed to reply! Social workers are supposed to
go to court if they want to stop contact but they didn't! I have no indication if the
children are alive or dead! Ultimately FRG are no help unless they can intervene
directly as an independent third party.*

*FRG are excellent and much needed for grandparents who are often forgotten and
alone but the very people children's services come to. Without FRG we would have
drowned!!*

8. Economic Impact

NPC constructed an economic model to estimate the cost benefit of the FRG Advice Service, which FRG have used to develop estimates based on the survey data presented in this report. The model is based on measuring the savings for care costs avoided and local authority costs saved by averting the need for long term or more intensive statutory involvement. Appendix 2 provides a summary of the model and the costs that have been used to calculate the cost benefit ratio of the FRG service.

A large proportion of the cost saving reflects the estimate that out of 5588 individual cases, the help of FRG led to reducing care costs for approximately 260 cases (5% of the total number of cases).

The model uses cautious estimates of values and cost because its results are in part based on self-reports via surveys. The survey data is fed in to an economic model that assumes the following:

- Each individual case only deals with one child²⁸
- Excludes the percentage of cases where people have contacted another service for support before contacting FRG. In order to calculate this we have used survey data²⁹
- Only considers cases that our advisers have classified as being about child protection as the main reason for calling FRG. In order to calculate this we have used FRG's advice database (in 2015/16 this was 30% of all cases)³⁰

Based on these assumptions and the survey results, we estimate that for every £1 invested in the FRG service, it saves the public purse £28 in care costs avoided and more effective and efficient use of social worker time. This figure represents the mean in a range of -1 standard deviation of £8 to +1 standard deviation of £48.

9. Conclusions

The data reported here supports the conclusion that FRG's Advice service is making a very real impact on some of the most vulnerable children in our communities and that it is meeting its objectives. Although a small sample, the results correlate with previous independent evaluations of the service, which together indicate that the service enables care to be avoided and/or ended for children so that they can continue to live safely within their family network. This evaluation also indicates that

²⁸ The model assumes one child per case to reduce complexity, but in reality this may mean underestimating savings, as some cases related to several children.

²⁹ In the first survey, 67% had relied only on FRG and in the second, 61% of the callers relied on FRG only. The model assumes that their use of another service was helpful, rather than merely signposting them to use FRG

³⁰ Advisers classify the main reasons for calling on our database, using the following categories: Voluntary Accommodation (Section 20), Adoption, Care Proceedings, Child Protection (Section 47), Family Support and Private Law. In 2015/16 the percentages of cases in each category were: Voluntary Accommodation 7%; Adoption 3%, Care Proceedings 19%, Child Protection 33%, Family Support 23% and Private Law 15%.

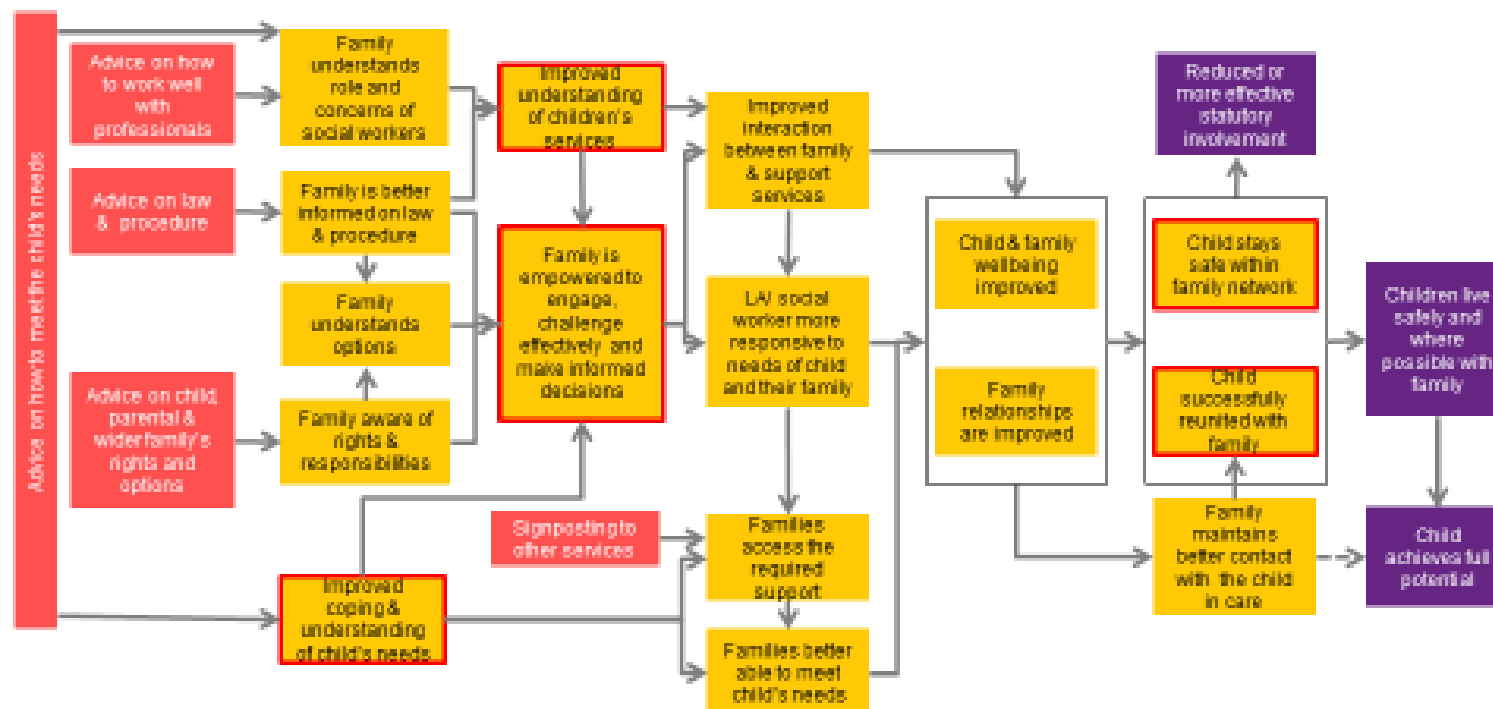
the service enables family members to work better with social workers, to understand their options, rights and responsibilities and to avert problems escalating.

Given that we did also get feedback about areas of improvement for the service, we note three key issues:

- I. Callers sometimes feel that they require more emotional support before they can take in the advice we are giving. Sometimes however, this may be that they cannot hear the advice at all because it is not what they want to hear. We will continue to use our robust quality assurance processes, including listening in to calls and checking database entries, to ensure that all advisers are providing emotional support as well as accurate advice.
- II. Callers wish that we could have more influence on their social worker. FRG does have a small amount of charitable trust funding to provide additional advocacy support by phone and email to very vulnerable young parents. It is clear that we need to continue to apply for funding to provide some level of advocacy to other service users, so that we can help callers write to their social worker or children's services department, to make their case more cogently, and to challenge where applicable, citing appropriate law and practice. We also need to consider whether we could make more sample letters for adaption available on our website for callers to download and adapt.
- III. The service does not, and cannot, insist that every local authority and every social worker follows the law and best practice. That is why FRG will continue to be a campaigning organisation, using the experiences of those who use our services to campaign for changes to law, guidance and practice.

Appendix 1 Theory of change summary

FRG ADVICE SERVICE THEORY OF CHANGE



■ Activity
 ■ Outcomes
 ■ Priority outcomes
 ■ Goals

Appendix 2: Summary of Economic Model

The model estimates a range of cost and benefit parameters, largely using assumptions derived from previous FRG evaluations, and a Monte Carlo analysis, which is a statistical method that stimulates thousands of scenarios after randomly altering the value of multiple variables to generate estimates of FRG's Benefit Cost ratios for the advice service from these assumptions.³¹ FRG used the model and updated the assumptions based on the survey data in this report.

The model uses conservative measures in order to compensate for being based on self reports by surveys of service users. To ensure that we get a reasonably accurate estimate of the value that the FRG's advice service generates, we assess whether the service makes a difference over and above what would have happened without the service (it is likely that some callers to FRG will otherwise have sought advice from elsewhere). The 'additional' value of FRG is therefore defined as the gross economic benefit of the service MINUS any benefits that would have occurred in the counterfactual scenario.³²

Benefit measures

³¹ Monte Carlo analysis, or probability simulation, is a technique used to understand the impact of risk and uncertainty in financial, cost, and other forecasting models. When you develop a model - any model that attempts to make certain assumptions - the best you can do is estimate the expected value. In this instance, it was possible to derive some assumptions using the survey data that were developed for previous evaluations, but we recognised that there is still inherent uncertainty and risks in estimates of an unknown value. Because of this uncertainty, it is often more appropriate to estimate a range of possible values for each assumption. By using a range of possible values, instead of a single guess, you can create a more realistic picture of what the net benefits of FRG are likely to be. When a model is based on ranges of estimates like this, the output of the model will also be a range. This is different from a normal forecasting model, in which you start with some fixed estimates. In a Monte Carlo simulation, a random variable is selected for each assumption, based on the range of possible estimates. Once this is done for each assumption, a single estimate of the model's output (in this case the net benefit of FRG's advice service) is calculated. The result of this model is recorded and the process is repeated. For this Monte Carlo simulation, we iterate the model 1000 times, each time using different randomly-selected values for each assumption. Since 1000 iterations will produce a distribution of a 1000 different estimates of the net benefit of FRG's advice service, which we can use to determine the most likely estimate of FRG's net benefit.

³² Ideally, we would account for this counterfactual by using a control or comparison group of people who have similar characteristics to users of the advice service, the only difference being that they did not actually use the service. However, since we do not have an estimate of the counterfactual, we account for this in this model by reducing the gross benefit of the service by an assumed proportion.

- **Additionality:** the proportion of the T1 sample who had not tried to contact other service for support before contacting FRG. (This also assumes that people who contacted other services did find this advice useful). In the current survey this proportion was 67%.

- **Relevance:** This figure uses FRG advice service call monitoring data for 2015/16: to measure cases that advisers have classified as a child protection issue. This classification is based on advisers judging that the main reason for calling was child protection enquiries, procedures or plans. In 2015/16 this applied to 30% of cases. In order to calculate the economic impact of the service, the model only uses 30% of the calls that have been calculated as additional (i.e. where the caller has not called another service – in this sample 67%).

- **Cases where FRG adds value:** Is the average of the proportion of above cases where T2 survey respondents *strongly* agree to the following two questions³³:
 - "I had a better understanding of children's services as a result of the call with FRG"; 47% strongly agreed.
 - "The support received from FRG has made a positive difference to the local authority plan and / or services for my child(ren)". 25% strongly agreed.

Savings measures

Once the model has calculated how many individual cases are relevant it then enables survey data to be fed in to measure cost savings. It measures short term and medium term outcomes and associated costs and savings.

The change in short term outcomes is based on the following calculation: Using a question in the follow up survey: "Since the call with FRG, I have felt better able to work with the social worker/ children's services". The model assumes that:

³³ In the current survey the average of the proportion of additional and relevant cases was 36%.

Strongly agree equals a 'decrease in statutory time'; agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree equals 'no change in statutory time'; the model also ascribes a fixed proportion of 5% to equal an 'increase in statutory time'³⁴. Based on the survey data the decrease in statutory time was 25%, no change was 70%, and an increase was 5%.

The change in medium term outcomes is based on the following calculation: Using a question in the follow up survey about where the child is living now, if the child is with the mother or father or wider family or friends network, this equals a 'decrease in medium-term costs'; if the child is in unrelated care this equals 'no change in medium-term costs'. In this survey 42% were living with the mother and/or father, 37% with the wider family and 21% were in the care system.

The proportion of cases with a decrease in medium-term costs is 79%. The proportion of cases with no change in medium-term costs is 21%. Based on all of the assumptions above, the estimate for the number of cases associated with a reduction in care costs (which were also relevant, additional and useful) averages as approximately 260 cases (5% of the caseload of 5588).

The reduction in care costs is estimated as ranging from £8,476 to £44,606 (see below).³⁵

Cost calculations

The cost of the Advice Service is £324,000 and the unit cost per individual is £58 (based on the 5588 unique individual callers to the service in 2015/16)³⁶.

³⁴ This is to allow for the possible scenario of FRG advice having identified potential bad practice by social services, and the FRG advice leading to more statutory time being spent on the case as a result.

³⁵ £44,606 comprises a) mean cost per child per year of being in care of £41,132 and b) legal costs of £4825 in those cases where the child is subject to care proceedings. Since 72% of looked after children are subject to proceedings, the figure used is 72% of £4825 i.e. £3474

³⁶ Note that some callers ring back as their case develops and they need further advice; these are legitimate calls, but in order to calculate the economic impact we have only counted callers, and not calls.

The cost calculations for short term outcomes are based on The Social Research Unit at Dartington (2013). 'Investing in Children: Technical Report', September 2013: Estimated cost of child protection system.

These are (per child):

- Initial assessment £487
- S47/Core Assessment £1,311
- Child protection plan £3,293
- Public Law Outline and Legal Fees £702

The cost calculations for medium term outcomes are mainly sourced from PSSRU (2014). 'Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2014', pg. 90³⁷

The costs used are:

- The mean cost per child per year of being in care (Looked After) is £41,132
- The mean cost of children in need being supported in their families is £8,476
- In addition, the legal costs, per case are £4,825 (The costs of S31 proceedings based on fee; sourced from the Ministry of Justice, 2009)³⁸;
- These legal costs apply to 72% of looked after children (the proportion who are not subjected to a voluntary agreement under S20, DfE, 2014)³⁹

³⁷ <http://www.pssru.ac.uk/project-pages/unit-costs/2014/>

³⁸ <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1044/1/court-fees-child-care-proceedings.pdf>. This excludes the estimated £25,000 average cost of each s1 application including legal aid (approximately 60% of total), local authorities' costs (25%), HMCS costs (5%); and CAFCASS costs (10%) – see <http://www.familieslink.co.uk/download/june07/Review%20of%20child%20care.pdf> p13

³⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359277/SFR36_2014_Text.pdf