

# Family Rights Group Advice Service Evaluation and Impact Report, January 2018

## 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 5504 calls, advising 5054 families in England and Wales during the financial year 2016/17<sup>1</sup>. Our advice service is primarily used by parents, who made up 64% of categorised callers in 2016/17. Wider family and friends comprised 28% 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 8% of those we advised. Of the parents contacting the advice service, 73.5% were mothers and 26.5% fathers.

In 2015 FRG worked with New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)<sup>2</sup> to establish a framework that would enable us to regularly conduct impact evaluations, including measuring

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<sup>1</sup> Some callers ring back as their case develops, requiring further advice.

<sup>2</sup> [www.thinknpc.org](http://www.thinknpc.org)

economic outcomes. A first report using this method was published in 2016.<sup>3</sup> During 2017 we re-ran the evaluation in order to produce this current report.

## **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.

The online survey of callers was sent to families who had called the service 1 – 5 days after they rang the FRG advice line (T1) and a follow up on-line survey was sent out four to six months following their call (T2). The surveys were conducted from November 2016 to September 2017.

### Survey T1

The T1 survey aimed to get feedback from callers and to assess the immediate impact of the advice they had received. We ran this survey between March 2016 and March 2017 and between from May 2017 and November 2017. Of 509 callers, who agreed to be contacted for research purposes, a total of 98 individuals responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 19%. Those 98 respondents' enquiries of the advice service concerned a total of 146 children). All respondents completed the survey online or by returning a hard copy of the survey by post.

### Survey T2

This survey of callers four to six months after they had contacted the advice line was primarily carried out to assess medium term outcomes for the child and family and whether FRG's service had contributed to these outcomes. The survey was conducted from June 2016 to February 2017 and run again from September 2017 to November 2017. Of 918 callers who agreed to be contacted for research purposes, a total of 119

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.frg.org.uk/images/PDFS/160429\\_Impact\\_Evaluation\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.frg.org.uk/images/PDFS/160429_Impact_Evaluation_Report_Final.pdf)

people responded to this survey resulting in a response rate of 13% (the calls concerned 190 children). The surveys are anonymised and respondents do not provide their name or other identifying details and all respondents participated in the survey online or by sending in a hard copy of the survey. This means that while we can be certain that all surveyed in T2 had contacted the advice service (for it is from callers to the advice service that the survey sample is drawn), we cannot be sure how many, or which, of those T2 respondents had actually completed the T1 survey.

### Response rate and sample size

Both the sample size (98) and the response rate (19%) for T1 reflect that many of those callers who were agreeable to being contacted for research purposes were not in fact available to provide feedback. There may be various factors that explain this, including:

- Child care responsibilities;
- The pressures and strains relating to why children's services were involved;
- Emotional stresses and time demands of working with children's services;
- Attendance at a range of meetings and appointments or similarly being involved with court proceedings.

The lower response rate for Survey T2 is to be expected. FRG advice line service is for the most part, a one off service. Callers may be in situations of flux and sometimes even chaos, so contact details as recorded at the time of their call to the advice service may well have changed a few months later, making it impossible for FRG to contact them for follow up feedback. Others may have moved on emotionally and not wish to revisit a very traumatic time in their lives.

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 measures<sup>4</sup>, which increases our confidence in the results.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/our-impact>

### 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 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**

The first survey (T1), which took place one to five days after the call to FRG:

- The 98 respondents were calling about 146 children, including babies (8% of respondents), one to five year olds (23%), six to twelve year olds (40%) and thirteen to nineteen year olds (29%);
- 89% of callers found the service helpful or very helpful;
- 90% of respondents felt that they had a better understanding of what they had to do as a result of the call to FRG;

- 83% felt more confident to have their say with the social worker/children's service as a result of the call with FRG;<sup>5 6</sup>
- 83% of respondents felt that they understood the law better as a result of the call with FRG;<sup>7</sup>
- 82% felt that they understood their rights and responsibilities better as a result of the call with FRG;<sup>8</sup>
- The majority (64%) felt that the call with FRG helped them to understand the concerns of the social worker;<sup>9</sup>
- 75% felt that the call with FRG improved their understanding of children's services procedures;<sup>10</sup>
- We asked respondents how they were coping before the call to FRG; only 15% felt they were coping quite well or very well; after the call 69% felt they were coping quite well, or very well; and
- 87% felt that it was the call with FRG that helped them to cope.<sup>11</sup>

In the second survey of people who had used the service four to six months previously (T2) 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. At the time of this follow up survey, one less child was living in unrelated care, and five fewer living with their parents. All six of these children went to live in their wider family network.

In addition:

- 52% felt better able to work with the social worker/children's services since the call with FRG;<sup>12</sup>
- 43% agreed that the call with FRG helped them gain a better understanding of the concerns of the social worker;<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> 5% replied the question was not applicable.

<sup>7</sup> 4% replied the question was not applicable.

<sup>8</sup> 3% replied the question was not applicable

<sup>9</sup> 16% replied the question was not applicable

<sup>10</sup> 4% replied the question was not applicable

<sup>11</sup> 3% replied the question was not applicable

<sup>12</sup> 8% replied the question was not applicable

<sup>13</sup> 16% replied the question was not applicable

- 86% agreed that they had a better understanding of what they had to do as a result of the call to FRG;<sup>14</sup>
- 79% agreed that they had a better understanding of children’s services procedures as a result of the call to FRG;<sup>15</sup>
- 71% agreed they felt more confident to have their say with the social worker/children’s services as a result of the call to FRG;<sup>16</sup>
- 47% agreed that the support they received from FRG made a positive difference to the local authority plan and/or services for their child/children.<sup>17</sup>

The economic model estimates both care costs avoided and savings on social worker time, and the findings suggest that the service saves at least £7.82 to £39.36 for every £1 invested, with a mean of £23.39. 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 £321,045 in 2016/17. Using the lower estimate means the Advice line in 2016/17 has saved the public purse approximately £2.5 million; using the mean figure it has saved the public purse approximately £7.6 million and using the higher estimate of the range, the advice line saved approximately £12.6 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. The Table compares respondents to the T1 survey in the recent evaluation with T1 respondents in last year’s evaluation (2015/16):

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<sup>14</sup> 1% replied the question was not applicable  
<sup>15</sup> 5% replied the question was not applicable  
<sup>16</sup> 5% replied the question was not applicable  
<sup>17</sup> 18% replied the question was not applicable

**Table 1 T1 survey respondents' relationship to the children they were calling about in 2015/16 and 2016/17**

	<b>Response Percent 2016/17</b>	<b>Response Percent 2015/16</b>
Mothers, including adoptive, step mothers and non resident	33%	47%
Father, incl. stepfathers, adoptive fathers	10%	15%
Grandparent	37%	19%
Other relatives, (e.g. Aunt/Uncle)	11%	14%
Family friends	6%	6%
Foster carer	1%	1%
<b>Base number</b>	<b>98<sup>18</sup></b>	<b>78</b>

There was a disproportionate number of wider family members and friends (54%) who answered the T1 survey compared to their proportion amongst all callers to the advice line (where they make up 28% of callers). Significantly, the T1 respondents in 2016/17 are also very different to those who responded to our first evaluation survey in 2015/16:

- In 2015/16 grandparents represented 19% of T1 respondents as compared to 37% in 2016/17.
- Taking into account that the base number for the 2016/17 T1 survey (98) is larger than that for 2015/16 (78), grandparents make up both a larger number and a larger proportion of respondents to the survey than they did in 2015/16.
- In 2015/16 parents accounted for 62% of the 78 T1 respondents.
- In the current survey, both a smaller number of parents responded to the T1 survey and parents represented a smaller proportion of respondents to the survey - 43% of the 98 respondents.

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<sup>18</sup> One respondent preferred not to answer and 1 was a professional

This difference in both the proportions of parent and grandparent respondents in the T1 survey sample, makes it difficult to make accurate comparisons between the economic impact data from this current evaluation and the 2015/16 evaluation.<sup>19</sup>

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 (84%; roughly the same as the 80% of all callers to the advice line); 12% were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, (for all callers to the line in the year 2016/17 this is 10%), 3% were Asian/Asian British, (for all callers to the line this is 5%); 1% from mixed or multiple ethnic groups (for all callers to the line this is 3%) and 1% from other ethnic groups (for callers to the service this is 2%).

### T2 Respondents

In this T2 survey 46% of respondents were parents (including non-resident, step, adoptive and foster parents). 52% of respondents were grandparents, wider family or family friends and the balance of respondents were professionals. In terms of ethnicity of those responding to the question<sup>20</sup>, 85% were White (as compared to 87% in the same survey in 2015/16); 9% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (a higher percentage as compared to the 4% of respondents from this ethnic group in the 2015/16 survey); 4% mixed/multiple ethnic groups (a group unrepresented amongst 2015/16 survey respondents); and 1% Asian/Asian British (lower than the 2% of respondents in the previous survey). The higher response rate from kinship carers is likely to reflect the fact that their situation may be more stable as compared to parents, so that we have a better chance of making contact with them and they may be more inclined to respond. The 119 respondents were caring for 190 children.

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<sup>19</sup> We have taken this into account when using the economic model calculations, as described later on in this report.

<sup>20</sup> Two respondents preferred not to say.

## 5. User satisfaction

89% of respondents to the T1 survey found the service helpful; 80% found it very helpful and 9% quite helpful. Only 5 respondents 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	80%
Quite helpful	9%
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	6%
Quite unhelpful	0%
Very unhelpful	5%
Base	98

## 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%	43%	38%	42%
Agree	32%	40%	45%	40%
Neither agree nor disagree	6%	9%	14%	13%
Disagree	3%	4%	1%	2%
Strongly disagree	1%	4%	2%	3%
<b>Base</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>95</b>

As a result of the call to FRG

- 90% of respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of what to do;
- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident to have their say with the social worker/children's services;
- 83% said they agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the law better;
- 82% said they agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

Most respondents (nearly 65%) felt that the call with FRG helped them to understand the concerns of the social worker.<sup>21</sup> (Table 4).

<sup>21</sup> The question was not applicable to 16% of respondents.

Three quarters (75%) felt that the call with FRG improved their understanding of children’s services procedures<sup>22</sup> (Table 4 overleaf).

**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	29%	41%
Agree	35%	34%
Neither agree nor disagree	29%	19%
Disagree	4%	4%
Strongly disagree	2%	1%
Base	82	94

We asked respondents how they were coping before the call to FRG, only 16%<sup>23</sup> felt they were coping quite well or very well. After the call, 69% felt they were coping quite well or very well.

<sup>22</sup>The question was not applicable to 4% of respondents.

<sup>23</sup> Rounded up from 15.6%

**Table 5 Improved coping, T1**

Answer Options	How would you say you were coping BEFORE your call with FRG?	How about AFTER your call?
Very well	6%	31%
Quite well	9%	38%
OK	28%	24%
Not very	39%	6%
Not at all	18%	1%
<i>Base</i>	96	96

The impact of FRG advice on the callers' ability to cope is also confirmed in the following question to which 87% answered that they felt that it was the call with FRG that helped them cope, 45% to a great extent and 42% to some extent<sup>24</sup>:

**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	45%

<sup>24</sup> 3% replied the question was not applicable

To some extent	42%
Not sure	7%
Not much	2%
Not at all	3%
Base	95

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

*“The gentleman I spoke with was so helpful in what is already an exceptionally stressful situation. He really was excellent.”*

*“The process was explained to me by someone I felt understood the difficulty I was facing. I’m very glad I called and would recommend your services to others.”*

*“I phoned FRG on two occasions and both times they spent a lot of time with me and fully explained the subject matter to me. Also they sent me material to help with my case. Excellent service.”*

*“There weren’t many specifics I was seeking advice on, but more a general opinion on a report social services carried out several months ago. My next stage is going to have to involve a costly solicitor so I was seeking some re-assurances that I wasn’t missing other options or completely wasting my time. The lady on the phone was kind and helpful and left me with the details of a good website to read a bit more before finally committing to the solicitors appointment.”*

Where a person found the call less helpful this sometimes related to not obtaining the information or support they were hoping for, or was connected to their overall frustration about the child welfare/family justice system and despair about what was happening in their family:

*I could do with more support as this is a hard time.*

*Everything in the Law to do with children is just biased against families. Social services want my great grandchild adopted and that is that unless I am very rich.*

*The social worker is being untruthful and deceitful and is twisting everything that's said. She is not accepting the stress she is causing my grandson who has ASD and ADHD. He has now run away from school twice and home yet there is no help because (name) feels it's her way or no way and threatens us with court. Tried explaining about his fight or flight mode so has his head master and mental health nurse but still (name) insists on emotionally abusing my grandson but that's ok she's allowed to as she is a social worker and no one wants to intervene by telling us how to deal with this. The manager ignores our pleas for a meeting but hey it's only a child's life we're talking about who has suicidal tenancies if his anxiety levels go too high. He's already scratching himself and school say his behaviour has become erratic since the social workers became involved. So unless you can wave a magic wand then you are hence are of no help to us."*

## **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 calls to FRG's advice line.

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

Answer Options	When you called FRG, where was the child/were the children living?		Where is the child/are the children living now?	
	Response Percent	Response Count	Response Percent	Response Count
Mother and/or father	44%	52	39%	47
Wider family or friends network	32%	38	37%	44

Non family and friends foster care, residential care and adoption	24%	29	24%	28
<i>Base</i>		119		119

At the time of the call to FRG, 44% of respondents to the follow up survey (T2) reported that the child was living with mother and/or father. 32% reported that the child was living within the wider family or friends' network and 24% unrelated care. By the time of the follow up survey (4 to 6 months after their call to FRG), 39% of children were living with their mother and/or father, 37% with the wider family or friends' network and 24% were in unrelated care. In numbers this is one less child in unrelated care, and five fewer living with their parents. All of those six children went on to be cared for within their 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 27 respondents who answered this question as being applicable to them, five felt that the call to FRG helped the child stay or be reunited with the mother and/or father to a great extent, nine felt it helped to some extent. Five felt it had either not really helped and five felt that it had not helped at all.

Where the child is now living with wider family or friends, we asked T2 respondents if FRG had helped to achieve this. Of the 36 respondents who answered this as being applicable to them, six felt that the call with FRG helped the child stay or be placed with that family member or friend to a great extent, 15 felt it helped to some extent and six felt it had either not really helped and four felt that it had not helped at all.

### 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. 106 responded: where applicable, 42% strongly agreed<sup>25</sup> and 10% agreed that they had felt better able; 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, 14% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed.

Those who agreed or strongly agreed made additional comments that explained how they felt better able to work with the social worker/children's services since the call with FRG:

*"The advice given gave me more confidence when dealing with the social worker as I had a greater understanding of the process and the advice given helped me to state our opinions as parents and grandparents."*

*"It enabled me to work positively with Children's Services rather than be defensive or refuse to work with them. This prevented the situation from escalating."*

*"[the call] helped me to understand how to cooperate with the social services."*

*"I had not been in this situation before and found it quite frightening. Being able to talk to someone impartial was invaluable, and enabled me to agree to work positively with Children's Services, knowing advice was there if I needed it, and has led to a positive outcome. I'm extremely grateful that this service exists."*

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

*"FRG were great, unfortunately children's services have no intention of helping teenagers and drag it out so their case can be closed at 18."*

### 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. 114 answered this question and of those who felt

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<sup>25</sup> 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.

that the question was relevant (81%), 15% strongly agreed that it had and a further 28% agreed. 30% neither agreed nor disagreed while 12% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed.

### *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 26 respondents who answered 17 felt that the call with FRG was very helpful in enabling them to cope. Three respondents felt it was quite helpful and four responded in equivocal terms selecting that they felt that the call with FRG was neither helpful nor unhelpful.

### *Helping service users to make informed choices and have their say, T2*

Respondents were asked whether they had a better understanding of what they had to do as a result of the call to FRG. They were also asked whether they had a better understanding of relevant children's services procedures and whether they felt more confident to have their say following their call. The survey findings reveal that:

- 114 respondents answered when asked whether they felt they had a better understanding of what they had to do as a result of the call to FRG. Of the 97% (111) for whom the question was relevant, 43% strongly agreed, 42% agreed, 9% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed<sup>26</sup>
- Of 109 respondents for whom the question was relevant, 57% strongly agreed and a further 22% agreed that they had a better understanding of children's services procedures as a result of the call to FRG. 11% neither agreed nor disagreed, 5% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed<sup>27</sup>
- Of 107 respondents for whom the question whether they felt more confident to have their say with social workers/children's services as a result of the call to FRG was relevant, 36% 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

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<sup>26</sup> This question was not relevant to 1% of respondents.

<sup>27</sup> This question was not relevant to 6% of respondents.

further 35% agreed, 21% neither agreed nor disagreed and 3% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed.<sup>28</sup>

Additional comments made by respondents highlighted the ways in which they particularly felt their understanding of procedures or their confidence to have their say had had improved as a result of the call to FRG and how they felt that this had made a difference:

*“I understood the process better.”*

*“It gave me the knowledge to challenge a decision about procedures that had been failed, and I was successful in my appeal.”*

*“Helped advise us how to progress from a “private arrangement” into securing an assessment and payment as kinship foster carers. was provided with letter outline.”*

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

89 answered, where relevant 28% 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 19% agreed, 27% neither agreed nor disagreed, 11% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed<sup>29</sup>. Respondents making additional comments illustrating just how they felt contact with the service had impacted on the local authority plans or services:

*“Advice from FRG helped me challenge children’s services so my son could access specialist residential services suitable for his disability.”*

*“Kept the child with family, gave good honest advice.”*

Those who had disagreed or strongly disagreed also provided additional comments which help to further understand their response:

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<sup>28</sup> This question was not relevant to 4% of respondents.

<sup>29</sup> This question was not relevant to 18% of respondents.

*“Unfortunately the situation with my child is the same but this is to do with the failings of the social worker*

*“I would like more help to work with my children to come home, they are in pain.”*

#### *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:

*“It helped me feel that I was justified in my concerns and able to pursue the right course of action.”*

*“I really needed the support I received through this service. They helped me to step back, calm down and see the whole picture. It helped me to take other support for my family and hold us all together when I felt like I was falling apart. One phonecall made so much difference to our lives. Thank you for your help.”*

*“It gave me more support to fight for my child's safety around stopping contact with abusive father, which children's services did not initially put adequate protection in place for.*

*“I was given a draft email to use with children services. It enabled (me) to speak to children services in a language they understand in a non confrontational way. I use this approach in all of my dealing with people in authority and people in general.”*

*I had a better understanding of the options not mentioned by children's services, and was able to get these options agreed in court.*

*“Very useful just a shame I wasn't able to get advocacy service to support in meetings.”*

*“Would like family rights legal advisors to get more involved in cases where injustice has been done and get supported.”*

## **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 5054 individual cases, the help of FRG led to reducing care costs for approximately 191 cases<sup>30</sup>.

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 into an economic model that assumes the following:

- Each individual case only deals with one child<sup>31</sup>
- Discounts a percentage of cases where people have contacted another service for support before contacting FRG<sup>32</sup>. In order to calculate this we have used survey data.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This is a lower number of cases than for the previous survey (which was 260). The reason for this is that funding for the service was reduced, leading to FRG being able to answer fewer callers as compared to the previous financial year.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> As this survey contained a much higher proportion of grandparent carers than expected for the model design, we have weighted the answer to the question of whether or not callers had used another service. We did this to appropriately reflect the fact that grandparents (overrepresented in the survey sample), in order to take on the care of their child, are far more likely to be in touch with other community based informal services. However, these services do not provide the specialist legal and social work advice provided by the FRG advice service.

<sup>33</sup> In the survey which informed the 2015/16 impact evaluation, 46% of respondents had relied only on FRG. The model assumes that their use of another service was helpful, rather than merely signposting the individual to use FRG. Review of survey data this year has included: analysis of differences in the respondent population as compared to the previous survey (grandparents are in this survey over-represented as compared to parents) and review of the additional comments made by respondents which shed light on the circumstances in which they may have contacted another service. This has allowed us to assess the likelihood of respondents having actually gained the specialist advice they needed through that other service. In light of this analysis, we have accordingly weighted the answer to the

- 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 2016/17 this was 28% of all cases).<sup>34</sup>

Based on these assumptions and the survey results, we estimate that for every £1 invested in the FRG service, it saves the public purse £23.39 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 £7.39 to +1 standard deviation of £39.36.

## 9. Conclusions

The data reported here supports the conclusion that FRG's Advice service is continuing to make a very real positive 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 and the 2015/16 evaluation and together indicate that the service enables care to be avoided and/or ended for children so that they can live safely within their family network. This evaluation again indicates that the service enables family members to work better with social workers, to understand their options, rights and responsibilities and to avert problems escalating.

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

- I. It remains the case that callers can sometimes feel that they require more emotional support before they can take in the advice being provided. Some callers however may struggle to hear or take in the advice at all because it is not what they want to hear. We will continue to use our quality assurance processes to ensure that all advisers are providing appropriate emotional support as well as accurate advice.
- II. Callers also wish that advisers could have more influence on the social worker involved with the child. FRG currently has no funding to provide additional

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question concerning contact with another service at 52% having not received the specialist advice that they require elsewhere.

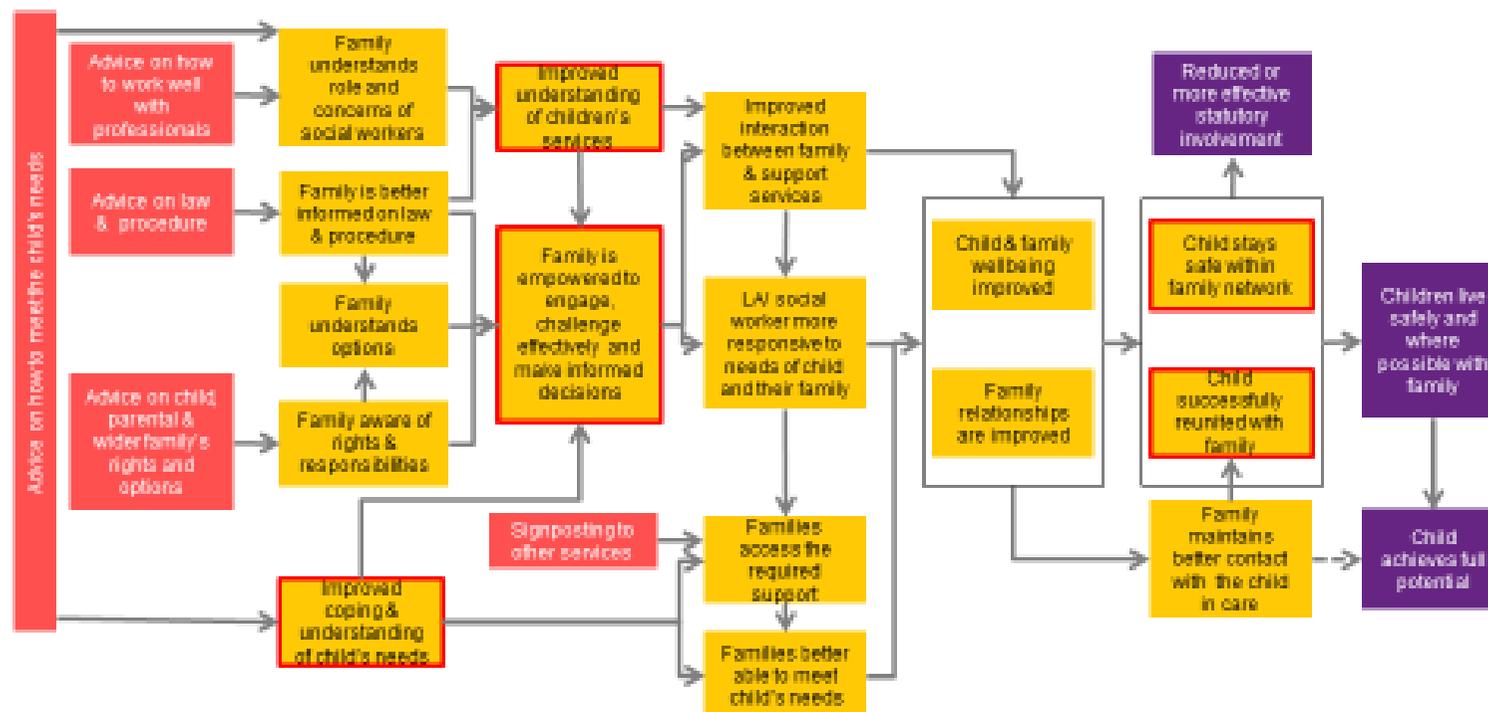
<sup>34</sup> Advisers classify the main reasons for calling on our database, using the following categories: Voluntary Accommodation (Section 20), Adoption, Care Proceedings, Child Protection (Section 47), Family Support and Private Law.

advocacy support to callers. We will be seeking further funds to provide some level of advocacy assistance to callers so that those in most need can be helped to make their case more clearly or cogently to the allocated social worker or children's services department, and to challenge where applicable, citing appropriate law and practice.

- 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 and influencing organisation, drawing on the experiences and insights of those who use our services to press 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

### Benefit measures

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<sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> 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 52%<sup>37</sup>.
- **Relevance:** This figure uses FRG advice service call monitoring data for 2016/17 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 2016/17 for 28% of cases the main reason for calling was categorised as being child protection. The model therefore only uses 28% of the calls that have been calculated as additional.
- **Cases where FRG adds value:** Is the average of the proportion of above cases where T2 survey respondents *strongly* agree to the following two questions<sup>38</sup>:
  - "I had a better understanding of children's services as a result of the call with FRG"; 27% strongly agreed.
  - "The support received from FRG has made a positive difference to the local authority plan and / or services for my child(ren)". 20% 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:

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<sup>37</sup> See above for the weighting we gave to this question as a result of the composition of respondents.

<sup>38</sup> 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'<sup>39</sup>. Based on the survey data the decrease in statutory time was 14%, no change was 81%, and an increase was 5%.

**The change in medium term outcomes** is based on the following calculation which uses data from the follow up survey (T2) provided in response to a question about where the child is living now. The model assumes that:

- If the child is with the mother or father or wider family or friends network, this equals a '**decrease in medium-term costs**'; and
- If the child is in unrelated care this equals '**no change in medium-term costs**'.

In this T2 survey, 39% of children were living with the mother and/or father; 37% were with the wider family; and 24% were in the care system. The proportion of cases with a decrease in medium-term costs (i.e cases in which the child was now with the mother, father or wider family and friends network) is 76%. The proportion of cases with no change in medium-term costs (i.e. cases where the child is in unrelated care) is 24%.

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 191 cases of the caseload of 5054).

The reduction in care costs is estimated as ranging from £8,476 to £44,606 (see below).<sup>40</sup>

#### Cost calculations

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<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> £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 - see full details of these cost calculations below and at footnote 44 (which mainly sourced from PSSRU (2014). 'Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2014'). Since 72% of looked after children are subject to proceedings, the figure used is 72% of £4825 i.e. £3474

**The cost of the Advice Service is £321,045<sup>41</sup>** and the unit cost per individual is £63.53 (based on the 5054 unique individual callers to the service in 2016/17)<sup>42</sup>.

**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. 90<sup>43</sup>

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)<sup>44</sup>;
- These legal costs apply to 72% of looked after children (the proportion who are not subjected to a voluntary agreement under S20, DfE, 2014)<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> This is based on the grant awarded to FRG and not the actual full cost.

<sup>42</sup> 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.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.pssru.ac.uk/project-pages/unit-costs/2014/>

<sup>44</sup> <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 CAF/CASS costs (10%) – see <http://www.familieslink.co.uk/download/june07/Review%20of%20child%20care.pdf> p13

<sup>45</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/359277/SFR36\\_2014\\_Text.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359277/SFR36_2014_Text.pdf). This premise for the model remains credible having regard to latest published figures from the DfE which reveal little change in the proportion of children looked after under a care order or placement order – 77% as at 31 March 2017. See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664995/SFR50\\_2017-Children\\_looked\\_after\\_in\\_England.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664995/SFR50_2017-Children_looked_after_in_England.pdf)