Family Matters: Project evaluation report

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1. Executive summary

- 1572 parents in total were supported by Family Matters
- 57% of FM participants were female
- 17% of FM participants described their ethnic background as ‘Other than White British’
- 37% of FM participants were referred to the service by a solicitor
- 37% of FM participants had not previously used a support service to help them with their separation
- 26% of FM participants had a child maintenance agreement in place
- 58% of FM participants did not have any agreed arrangements with their partner regarding the children
- 55% of FM participants had been with their ex-partner for more than five years
2. Introduction

2.1 About Resolution

Resolution is an organisation of 6,500 family lawyers and other professionals in England and Wales who collectively believe in a constructive, non-confrontational approach to family law matters. Resolution supports the development of family lawyers through its national and regional training programmes, publications and good practice guides and its accreditation scheme. Resolution trains and accredits mediators and campaigns for improvements to the family justice system.

2.2 The Family Matters project

Family Matters was a ground-breaking project that helped separating and separated parents to collaborate more effectively in the best interest of their children. Offering free information and support to those on a low income, the project was developed and delivered by Resolution and funded through the Department for Work and Pensions' Help and Support for Separated Families Innovation Fund.

Family Matters was built around the innovative concept of a new type of practitioner – the ‘Family Matters Guide’. These highly trained professional lawyers or mediators combined their legal know-how with strong conflict resolution skills to:

- work with both parents – together or as individuals
- provide legal information (not legal advice)
- guide parents to reach their own agreements
- deal with parents’ legal, emotional and practical difficulties in a holistic way, helping them to access relevant local sources of support through an action planning approach.

The Family Matters service was delivered from legal practices in Crewe, Oxford and Newcastle-upon-Tyne over a 2.5 year period (April 2013 to September 2015).
2.3 About this report

This report provides an overview of the Family Matters project and its achievements for over 1,500 parents across England. It summarises the principles behind Family Matters, how the service was developed and delivered, and provides information about the participants, outcomes, and key learnings to be considered in the development of future practice. This report complements other Family Matters project documentation, in particular, independent research that assessed the Family Matters model and implications for professional practice (Guiding parents through separation report – see Section 8.3 for further detail) and a separate programme-wide evaluation conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions (due to be published in summer 2016).

A total of 1572 people participated in the Family Matters service. Some participants chose not to provide all the data and information requested across the course of the project. Also, due to a change in the management information required by the funder, a different set of data was collected in year one from in the last 18 months of the project. Therefore, base sizes are shown for each question or area analysed and these relate to the number of individuals that provided information or a response that could be included.
3. About Family Matters

3.1 Project aim

The Family Matters project was developed for separating parents, to provide them with the support and information they needed to get through their break up in a way that had the best results for their family. The project specifically targeted vulnerable or disadvantaged parents – those who would previously have been eligible for legal aid or had always fallen just outside of financial eligibility. Family Matters aimed to work with both parents together at a particularly traumatic time in their lives, in order to reduce the negative impact on their children and minimise the long-term cost to society.

3.2 Background to the project

The 2012 green paper on child maintenance policy, Supporting separated families; securing children’s futures, recognised the importance of coordinating the support available to separating families. It set the scene for ‘the development of interventions that promote collaboration and reduce conflict between separating and separated parents, in the best interests of their children’.

This led to the Help and Support for Separated Families (HSSF) Innovation Fund, which earmarked £10 million to test and evaluate innovative interventions to help separated parents collaborate in the best interests of their children. Family Matters was one of 17 pilot projects selected through a tender process under this fund. The project closed in September 2015 when funding from the Department for Work and Pensions came to an end. At the time of writing this report, the HSSF programme is being evaluated by the Department for Work and Pensions with a view to reporting on the effectiveness of all 17 projects.
3.3 Design of the Family Matters model

The HSSF Innovation Fund was timely for Resolution as it was specifically designed to test new and innovative service models. Resolution created the Family Matters model by amalgamating a range of new ideas from within the dispute resolution field. Specifically, the model was based on piloting a new type of practitioner – ‘Family Matters Guides’ – who were legal experts with experience of working with couples in conflict. Their role was designed to be highly proactive and involved: not only giving parents legal information and mediating, but also actively putting parents in touch with other local services to help them receive support for a range of complex needs, including housing, debt and health.

Given that legal aid was severely restricted by LASPO (the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012), the Family Matters model aimed to provide an alternative way of working with parents, the majority of whom could no longer access legal aid. The Family Matters service was specifically designed for low-income families facing multiple complex problems in a ‘post LASPO world’; those with nowhere else to go for support with their family separation issues. In essence, the Family Matters model involved three key features within an action planning framework:

- provision of legal information
- the offer of holistic support (and signposting)
- support with coming to joint arrangements.

The design of the Family Matters model did not arise out of any one existing concept, but was created from a set of ideas being formulated in Resolution at the time. A Resolution initiative for separated parents called Parenting after Parting played a key role in this process. Parenting after Parting combined workshops for separating parents with a booklet that Resolution’s members could use to support their clients to minimise the potential damage of their relationship break-up on their children. It acknowledged the wider elements of the role of the legal practitioner in supporting couples through separation, with a focus on the importance of ‘soft skills’ in achieving a positive outcome for their families.

3.4 Rationale for the Family Matters model

Resolution developed the Family Matters model in response to three key factors that were affecting separating and separated parents: developments in the family justice system; growing complex needs of low-income separating couples; and new developments in the field of dispute resolution.
(i) Developments in the family justice system: With the implementation of the LASPO Act on 1 April 2013, legal aid became available only for cases that contained a ‘qualifying trigger’ of domestic violence, child abuse or abduction. It was estimated that 200,000 fewer families were eligible for legal aid as a result of this, with 33,000 no longer qualifying for legal representation. Family Matters was designed to work with parents that had been eligible for legal aid as well as those who just fell outside of traditional financial eligibility. This group includes those on income-related benefits, those who had no income or benefits because they had just separated, and those on a low income. It aimed to reach vulnerable or disadvantaged parents at a particularly traumatic time in their lives.

(ii) Complex needs of low-income separating couples: People can feel temporarily vulnerable when a relationship ends. They are likely to feel grief, fear for the future, confusion, anger, isolation, and mistrust. If the person concerned suddenly finds themselves a single parent or is separated from their children, has debt problems, is at risk of homelessness, or is worried about their children’s distress and behaviour, then their vulnerability is likely to be more severe, longer lasting and sometimes crippling. Recovery is likely to take significantly longer. A survey conducted by the English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Panel in 2012 highlighted this issue, reporting that those eligible for legal aid had a greater number of problems, particularly associated with poverty.

Family Matters aimed to achieve better outcomes for low-income parents and their children by ensuring they could access the right services, in the right place, at the right time. The project embedded Family Matters Guides in local legal practices, aiming to support parents through a process and to access the wide range of help available to them. Family Matters Guides worked to develop an understanding of the information and support available to parents and to build a strong relationship with the community organisations providing this support.

(iii) New developments in the field of dispute resolution (DR): Over the last 30 years in the UK, there has been an increasing desire to try out new ways of working that incorporate out-of-court dispute resolution (DR) processes into the family justice system. The great majority of cases are often
resolved by the parties coming to a compromise by themselves, or their solicitors negotiating with one another. To improve the chances of a resolution outside of court, various DR processes have developed:

- **Mediation:** In which an impartial mediator helps parents to work out their issues for themselves (recently bolstered by increases to public funding and changes to the law).
- **Collaborative practice:** A form of face-to-face negotiation supported by solicitors and a range of other family professionals.
- **Family arbitration:** A confidential court-like private forum with an arbitrator (‘judge’) resulting in joint decisions that are very hard to appeal.

Most recently, the legal profession in the UK has been exploring the option of one lawyer working with both parties in separation cases (the ‘one lawyer, two client model’), but this is, as yet, an unestablished model. These innovations in practice coincided with growing evidence of the negative impact of cuts in legal aid on the family law profession. Family lawyers continue to experience a reduction in annual income alongside growing challenges to their profession, practice and traditional business structures. Family Matters aimed to blend traditional legal knowledge with mediation skills, representing an opportunity to explore new service approaches in the context of a shrinking traditional legal advice sector.

### 3.5 How the project worked

The Family Matters project was delivered from three local law practices in Oxford, Newcastle and Crewe. Parents could self-refer to the service or be referred by solicitors, mediators, schools or other family support services. Highly skilled professionals were recruited into the role of ‘Family Matters Guide’. Guides were qualified lawyer mediators who could bring their legal know-how to the service not as lawyers, but as a trusted and knowledgeable ‘hand to hold’ through the process of reaching an agreement. Guides were required to have excellent dispute resolution skills, communication skills and a strong understanding of local services.

The Family Matters Guide would meet with the first parent to identify any issues they were facing or wished to resolve. The second parent was then invited to engage in the process with the aim of meeting both parents together so they could discuss how to resolve any problems. The role of the Family Matters Guide was to identify the practical and emotional issues parents were facing as well as the possible solutions, or sources of support required to resolve them. In addition to working with parents to identify the journey they needed to make to reach the right solutions for their family, Family Matters Guides aimed to help couples improve communication and cooperation (both vital
elements if the parents are to reach agreements that put children’s well-being at their heart).

“…a bit like lawyer-supported mediation in that we don’t give that advice, but we can give very tailored information because we’re solicitors as well.” Family Matters Guide

The length of Family Matters meetings was dependent on each individual’s needs, but generally they were between one and two hours. There was no limit to the support a parent was able to receive and no cost associated to participating in Family Matters.

3.6 Recruitment and training of Family Matters Guides

Resolution envisaged that Family Matters Guides would be trained legal practitioners either with existing mediation skills or with the potential to acquire these skills. The proposed model was to recruit staff from within host solicitors firms, and second them on a part-time basis. The rationale for this was that, if Guides maintained a level of involvement with mainstream family law practice, it would help to keep their legal knowledge and skills up to date.

In Newcastle, both Guides were able to continue their work with the host firm, and allocated half of their working week to Family Matters on a flexible basis. In Crewe, one Guide was recruited from within the host firm, and the second was recruited on a freelance basis (a barrister and practising mediator). In Oxford, recruitment of Guides from the existing staff team was not possible, and therefore two part-time Guides were recruited. In all cases except the freelancer, the Guides were employed by the host firm and seconded to Resolution.

Guides who were not already trained mediators underwent mediation training, and all Guides took part in a Family Matters training day with Resolution before they started delivering the service.

3.7 Project management

Overall management of the Family Matters project nationally was split between two people within

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1 Skinner and Forster (2015) Guiding parents through separation: Family Matters - an innovative support service from Resolution
Resolution, with 80% of the resource allocated to a generic project management role, and 20% to a technical project management. A range of policies were developed as part of the project planning phase, including:

- Conflict of interest policy
- Domestic abuse policy
- Protocol on safeguarding children and young people
- Protocol on appointments with parents outside of the office
- Twitter policy

Documents were also developed to support the client journey, including a template parent action plan (see Appendix 1) and client agreement template (see Appendix 2).

Quarterly review meetings were put into place for all staff working on the project. These focused on sharing best practice, discussing potential improvements to the service, and a case discussion session, which was used for consistency checking and to inform the project’s ‘frequently asked questions’ documentation. Monthly project-team phone conferences took place and the Family Matters Project Manager visited each host firm on a rotation basis each month for:

- one-to-ones with each Guide
- observation of a parent session
- a team meeting with both Guides and the governance representative at the host firm.

Quarterly governance meetings took place to discuss strategic elements of the project, finance, sustainability and any issues related to the project. Quarterly service review meetings were held between the Department for Work and Pensions and Resolution to discuss progress and any contractual issues, alongside a monthly update between the Department for Work and Pensions HSSF Delivery Manager and the Family Matters Project Manager.

Improvements to the service were discussed in all of the above sessions, and changes made according to these discussions as well as feedback received directly from parents.
A Family Matters Case Study (1)

How Family Matters helped a couple who were reluctant to go to mediation

Mum and Dad had been married for five years and separated in 2013. Dad had left the family home whilst Mum remained with the children who were aged six and four. There had been domestic abuse within the relationship and Dad had made threats to self-harm. Mum met a Family Matters Guide at a women's group drop-in session and said that she wanted information around divorce, the family home and the arrangements for the children.

The Family Matters Guide initially met with Mum and talked her through her legal options and encouraged her to reach an agreement with her ex about the children. The Guide then contacted and met with Dad, who was happy for Mum to remain in the property, which was tenanted, but wanted to set up contact for the children. The Guide discussed the option of formal mediation with both parents but they seemed reluctant to go through the more formal structure of meetings, public funding assessments and initial MIAMs. Whilst agreeing in principle, in practice both parents were quite resistant to mediation due to Dad’s working commitments and Mum’s reluctance to meet with Dad.

Eventually, when Mum felt that she had got to know the Family Matters Guide, three joint meetings were held. The Family Matters Guide used their legal knowledge to point the parents in the right direction, and mediation skills to facilitate these joint meetings. Over the course of the three meetings, Mum and Dad were able to resolve all issues with respect to the children and written plans were developed as a blueprint for them to follow. By the third and final joint meeting, the parents had established a routine and were able to be flexible when needed and were both civil (they came to the final meeting having discussed what they want to achieve between them before the meeting).

At the end of their involvement with Family Matters, the parents were speaking again, able to manage the arrangements for the children between themselves, and the children had regular settled contact. In addition, their issues around child maintenance had been resolved.

“This service is so valuable to people like myself who literally have no one to turn to for the appropriate advice, and I hope it continues for other people in the future.”
4. Participant demographics

A total of 1572 parents participated in the Family Matters project over the course of 2.5 years. This section provides detail on the demographics of those individuals.

4.1 Gender

More than half (57%) of Family Matters participants were female.
4.2 Age

The majority of Family Matters participants were aged between 25 and 44 (62%). There were very few participants aged under 17 (0.3%) or over 55 (2%).

![Age Distribution Chart](image-url)
4.3 Ethnic background

Almost three quarters (73%) of those who participated in Family Matters described themselves as White British, whilst 17% described themselves as ‘other than White British’. The remaining 10% chose not to share details on their ethnic background.

When compared to overall population data, the project engaged a high proportion of people from ethnic minority groups. According to statistics from the 2011 Census, 19.6% of the population in England and Wales describes themselves as ‘Other than White British’ (Office for National Statistics, 2011).
4.4 Disability, illness or long-term impairment

Family Matters participants were asked to state whether they had a long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness or disability that had affected them for 12 months or was likely to affect them for 12 months. Almost a fifth (19%) of the participants answered ‘yes’ to this question, which may not be surprising given that the project set out to support some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged separating/separated parents.
4.5 Employment status

Almost a fifth (18%) of those that participated in Family Matters were looking after their children full time and a similar proportion (17%) were employed on a part-time basis. Perhaps surprisingly given the particular focus of the Family Matters project on those with low income, just 14% of the participants described themselves as ‘unemployed and looking for work’.

![Employment status chart]

Base: 1163
4.6 Household income

Family Matters participants were asked to give an indication of their annual household income, including their salary, that of a partner (if they had one) and/or any benefits. The majority (65%) stated that their household income was between £4,800 and £23,999, whilst a small proportion (8%) had total income of over £24,000.
5. Recruiting Family Matters participants

5.1 The recruitment plan

Promotion of Family Matters and recruitment of participants was a bigger task than anticipated at the outset of the project. Family Matters was designed in a pre-LASPO environment and calculations and target numbers for recruitment of participants were based on the numbers of:

- parents accessing legal aid at the time
- parents seeking legal support who were unable to then access it (because they didn’t quite meet the eligibility criteria)
- people accessing similar services such as debt management help and advice (for example, via Citizens Advice).

When the project was designed, Resolution worked on the principle that a significant proportion of participants would be driven to Family Matters having presented at the host firm expecting legal aid, or having been referred from neighbouring solicitors’ firms. The drop in numbers of people seeking help as a result of changes in legal aid had not been fully anticipated and so in reality, the number of participants recruited through solicitors was significantly lower than expected. As a result, a wider marketing and promotional plan was put into place within weeks of the project’s start date.

5.2 Marketing and promotional activity

The original project promotion plan involved utilising local press to publicise the launch of the Family Matters service in each of the three locations as well as press releases to trade outlets nationally. In addition, Resolution produced and distributed leaflets promoting the service (see Appendix 3) and ensured that networking with local referral organisations such as solicitors’ firms, advice services and women’s support organisations was a key component of the Family Matters Guides’ roles.

In the first three months of the project, it became clear that the target number of participants was not being reached so a range of additional promotional activities took place, including:

- stalls in supermarkets and a bingo hall (Crewe)
- paid-for advertising in free local magazines and newspapers (Crewe and Newcastle)
- launch events and community radio interviews (Crewe)
- presentations to potential referral organisations (Newcastle)
- drop-ins at other services, such as women’s groups
- leaflet drops in targeted postcode areas (all locations).

As a result of lower referral rates from solicitors than anticipated, promotion of the service took a greater proportion of the Family Matters Guides’ time than planned. Building awareness of the service within the local community was also more time-consuming as the Guides needed to invest time in gaining credibility with referral organisations.

5.3 Sources of referrals to Family Matters

By the end of the project, just over a third (37%) of Family Matters participants had been referred to the service via a solicitor. Additional marketing and promotional activity had the desired impact as a quarter of those that became involved in the project had either self-referred (10%) or been referred by their partner (14%). Places that separating parents already visited (contact centres, Children Centres, courts and Citizens Advice) proved a highly effective route for reaching the target market, with 9% of all participants being referred by Citizens Advice (CAB), for example.
5.4 Numbers of participants supported at each Family Matters location

The Oxford practice recruited and worked with the highest number parents over the course of the Family Matters project, followed by Crewe and then Newcastle. The reason for the variation in the number of participants at each location is not entirely clear. However, the Oxford service developed very good referral relationships with local support organisations, including social services. There seemed to be nowhere else for separating parents with a range of issues to go for support. Whilst this meant that referrals to the Oxford service were high, the lack of other support services in the area also presented some challenges – not all of the referrals were appropriate for Family Matters and it was often difficult to find other organisations to refer and signpost parents on to. In Newcastle, there was another provider offering a similar service to Family Matters, which naturally resulted in lower take-up rates.
5.5 Numbers of participants in the project by month

Over the course of the project, an average of 52 parents were supported each month. As shown below, it took some time to get the project off the ground and the monthly number of participants peaked in September 2014 (at the 18 month point) when 92 parents were supported.

“Family Matters has been wonderful, I couldn’t have done it without them, they are amazing.”
A Family Matters Case Study (2)

How Family Matters helped a separated couple finalise the financial arrangements around their divorce

Mum and Dad had been married for 12 years when Mum commenced divorce proceedings. They had one child together, a son aged 14 with autism. The decree nisi had been granted but there had been lengthy negotiations in relation to financial matters. Mum had sought legal advice about this and had been represented, but her solicitors had been unable to continue assisting her as her income increased, taking her just over the minimum income level for legal aid. She was unable to afford a solicitor privately and Dad had always acted in person through choice.

The main asset was the family home, which at some point during the negotiations had equity but had since gone into negative equity due to the situation with the property market. Mum and Dad felt stuck. Mum’s solicitors had led the progress and she felt unable to move forward or find a solution. Dad was paying for the mortgage but was struggling to afford the repayments and outgoings. Neither understood the options as they currently stood and the situation was placing a great deal of strain on both Mum and Dad. As a result, their relationship was beginning to deteriorate and have an impact on their son. Both wanted to resolve financial matters, to reach an agreement about the family home and finalise their divorce so they could move on.

Both Mum and Dad wanted to progress without legal representation (as they could not afford this). Having discussed their options with a Family Matters Guide, they attended a joint meeting. The Guide talked them through the law in relation to dealing with the matrimonial finances and explained the importance of financial disclosure. The Guide talked them through the different options of resolving matters and what a consent order was, including a clean break consent order, and how this could be reached, as well as options in relation to the home. At the meeting, Mum and Dad reached an agreement and the Family Matters Guide gave them information about how they could make this binding, including a precedent consent order and a blank statement of information form. The Guide explained the procedure and costs involved and talked them through the last stage of the divorce – application for decree absolute – and the implications of this.

Mum and Dad both expressed a huge sense of relief that they had reached agreement and that they understood how they could finalise matters and bring the divorce proceedings to an end. Helping Mum and Dad resolve their issues required mediation skills, working knowledge of the law and procedure surrounding matrimonial finance issues as well as experience of how the court would deal with such issues.
6. Family Matters participants’ situations

In order to provide the most tailored support to each parent that participated in the Family Matters project, they were asked to provide information about their previous relationship with their ex-partner, any arrangements that were in place in relation to their children and some basic information on their current relationship status.

6.1 Status of relationship with ex-partner

Over three quarters (78%) of participants in the Family Matters project described themselves as either separated or separated but still legally married. Six percent were still living with their partner (either married or not married) and a small minority (3%) had never been in a relationship with the person with whom they had a child.
6.2 Previous use of support services

Participants were asked if they had used any other forms of help and support whilst separating. Over a third (37%) had not, whilst almost a fifth (18%) had sought some kind of legal help during the process. Mediation was a relatively unexplored route, with just 13% of those coming to Family Matters having tried this option.
6.3 Length of relationship with ex-partner

When asked how long their relationship had lasted, more than half of the participants (55%) stated that they had been together with their ex-partner for more than five years, with a further quarter (28%) having been together for more than two years.
6.4 Length of separation from ex-partner

Almost half of all Family Matters participants (45%) had been separated from their ex-partner for less than one year, whilst 15% had been apart for more than five years.
6.5 Number of children together

Family Matters participants were asked to state how many children they had specifically with their ex-partner. Over half (54%) had one child, with a further third (31%) having two children. The greatest number of children was 10.
6.6 Care of children

Over half (55%) of the Family Matters participants were the main carer of children from their relationship with their ex-partner, whilst 11% stated that care was shared with their ex-partner.
6.7 Arrangements regarding children

Participants were asked to state whether they had an arrangement with their ex-partner for their children. An ‘arrangement’ was defined as one that was “either formally written down or just informally agreed between both parties”, and could include one or a combination of the following:

- Contact
- Payment for support of the children
- Non-financial contributions (e.g. clothes or contributing to care arrangements)
- Shared care

The majority of those participating in Family Matters (58%) did not have such an arrangement in place.

Those who did have an arrangement in place were asked to state how happy they were with the arrangement. Less than a quarter (22%) described themselves as happy, whilst 59% stated that they were unhappy with the arrangement.
6.8 Child maintenance

A quarter (26%) of participants in Family Matters had a statutory child maintenance agreement with their ex-partner, either via the Child Support Agency or the Child Maintenance Service.
6.9 Current relationship status

When asked about their current relationship status, two thirds of Family Matters participants (66%) described themselves as ‘single, no partner’. Just two percent were married with a new partner, and a further 27% had a new partner.
7. Parent sessions with Family Matters Guides

Family Matters Guides were available to meet with parents as many times as necessary to help them find a resolution that best suited the needs of their family. The number of separate and joint meetings attended by parents was recorded, alongside information regarding where participants were referred on to at the end of their time with Family Matters.

7.1 Number of sessions attended by Family Matters participants

The vast majority of parents that were supported by the Family Matters project (76%) had one meeting with a Family Matters Guide. A further 16% had two meetings, and seven percent had three meetings or more. It is important to note that whilst one meeting with a Family Matters Guide was most common, often this involved each of two parents meeting once with a Family Matters Guide to discuss their issues and a route forward, as illustrated by Case Study 3 on page 25. In addition, often a meeting was followed up by email and phone communication, but recorded as one meeting.
7.2 Number of joint meetings attended by Family Matters participants

When Family Matters was developed, it was expected that both parents would need to be involved in a joint meeting with a Family Matters Guide where possible, in order to discuss their issues together and aim to reach a resolution or identify next steps that were agreeable to both parties. However, early in year one, Family Matters Guides reported that it was often difficult to persuade the second parent to use the service. Sometimes this was because the second parent didn’t perceive there to be a problem (the first parent had contacted Family Matters because they were unhappy, but the second parent thought everything was working out fine). In other cases, the second parent refused to engage because they felt that the service was ‘on the other parent’s side’. At the end of the project, 12% of the participants had attended a joint meeting. Family Matters Guides had established that often, separate meetings with each partner were just as an effective route to resolving issues.

‘…you don’t even have to see them together to find that it’s made a significant difference to their view on their position, they see their position in a different place.’ Family Matters Guide

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2 Skinner and Forster (2015) Guiding parents through separation: Family Matters - an innovative support service from Resolution
7.3 Where Family Matters participants were referred to next

On completion of their involvement in the Family Matters project, parents were frequently referred on to further support services. As illustrated below, whilst many parents had not attended a joint meeting within the Family Matters project, over half (57%) of those referred on to other services were referred on for mediation. A further 21% were referred to a solicitor and 18% to another advice/support agency or service.

“Family Matters do a wonderful job and I believe that if my ex was a little more co-operative, then we could have made some positive progress with this situation.”
A Family Matters Case Study

(3)

How Family Matters helped a separated couple improve their communication and contact arrangements for their child

Mum visited Family Matters following her recent separation from Dad. They had been in a relationship for 13 years, had one daughter together (aged two), and had separated eight weeks previously. Contact arrangements for their daughter were proving difficult as a result of Dad’s lack of acceptance that the relationship was over.

Dad was very emotional and overwhelmed by the whole separation and the situation he found himself in. Mum had continued to live at the property she had shared with Dad, and, given his lack of acceptance that the relationship had ended, Dad struggled to attend the home for collection and return of his daughter for contact, relying instead on the paternal grandmother to do this. Mum was not happy about this as the grandmother had shown resentment and appeared to blame Mum for Dad’s emotional breakdown.

When they came to Family Matters, Mum and Dad were not communicating at all. Mum wanted Dad to be involved in their daughter's life but wanted reassurance that this would not impact on his mental health. She wanted Dad to facilitate handovers and to communicate with her directly. Dad wanted Mum to show some understanding of his feelings and to understand that he needed more time before he could come to terms with attending their once shared home.

The Family Matters Guide met with Mum first and gave her information about the options for putting in place arrangements for Dad to see their daughter. Neither of the parents was eligible for legal aid and the Guide explained that whilst a solicitors/court route may result in a written agreement about the practical arrangements for contact, the issues around communication and trust would not be effectively dealt with. The Guide discussed ways of making the practical arrangements easier for Dad initially, such as arranging...
handovers away from the home in a neutral public venue and using a communication book/text messages for communication.

The Family Matters Guide then met with Dad who was undergoing counselling at the time. He accepted that it would be best for him to communicate with Mum and to consider re-establishing contact by facilitating handovers himself. The Guide talked him through his options, gave him information about places he could go for further support and explained the issues. He agreed to make the changes that Mum was proposing but did not want to attend a joint meeting.

The Family Matters Guide reviewed the situation a few weeks later and both parents confirmed that they had managed to sort things out between them. Dad was seeing their daughter regularly with flexible arrangements. Mum was very happy with the improved communication and Dad was content with how matters had progressed. Although a joint meeting did not take place, Family Matters played a unique role in working with both parents separately to ensure that the path was eased. The Family Matters Guide was able to go between Mum and Dad to share helpful information and reassure both having spoken to the other.

The Family Matters Guide drew on legal knowledge to enable the parents to consider how matters could be resolved and their experience as a lawyer to assist both parents with practical options. Mediation skills were vital too in terms of acknowledging how difficult things were for both Mum and Dad. Mum gave feedback on her experience of Family Matters:

“Family Matters was perfect for my situation – I feel that Family Matters is not goal orientated like mediation – we were able to work at our own pace and I was offered solutions, support, and information all in one service.”
8. Family Matters outcomes

8.1 Monitoring and evaluation process

All parents using the Family Matters service were asked to complete a questionnaire focusing on how they felt about their situation before their first Family Matters meeting. Similar questions were asked at various stages of their journey, with a final questionnaire completed once they had completed their time with Family Matters. Data was recorded where possible and extrapolated to provide outcomes for the project as a whole.

8.2 Impact of the service

As illustrated in the table below, the project delivered excellent results. Almost all (95%) of parents that participated in the Family Matters project felt that the information and support they had been given was beneficial. A further 85% felt better informed about their situation and 78% felt able to take action as a result of Family Matters. The change recorded in how parents felt about the benefits of making arrangements together should also be noted as a key achievement – 76% better understood the benefits of this after using the service. This suggests a longer-term outcome relating to how parents reach agreements about their parenting.

Family Matters exceeded its target outcomes in all areas with the exception of the number of parents attending a joint meeting with a Family Matters Guide (see Section 7.2 for further detail).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key performance indicators</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents attending joint/collaborative session (incl. referrals to mediation)*</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents experiencing improved communication</td>
<td>No target</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents with improved access to information</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents finding information/support beneficial</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents who feel able to take action</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents who feel better about their situation after having seen a trusted guide</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents who feel better informed about their situation</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents understand benefits of making arrangements together</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Referrals to joint mediation were included when calculating this outcome (which led to a higher percentage than that seen in Chart 7.2)
8.3 Research in partnership with York University

The Family Matters project trialled an innovative approach and new model of practice for working with separating families. In 2015, Resolution commissioned Dr Christine Skinner from the University of York to assess the Family Matters model. This research was published in 2015 and revealed a range of insights and implications for professional practice, in particular:

- The unique approach of the Family Matters Guides, combining the roles of mediator and lawyer without the traditional professional constraints of either, allowed them to work more impartially and collaboratively with parents.
- The research identified a possible ‘early stage’ in the separation process or dispute in which parents needed intensive support to help them ‘move on’ to the next stage to resolution.
- The Family Matters Guides believed that the ‘neutral voice’ they provided helped parents to minimise conflict during the separation process and enabled them to keep their relationship more stable while they decided their next course of action and, importantly, helped them to become ready for mediation.

Dr Christine Skinner said of Family Matters:

“This was an exceptional innovation created by Resolution. It pushed the boundaries of traditional legal practice to explore how professionals might combine a set of skills to work with parents together in a neutral way to help them make their own agreements in the best interests of their children. It has generated a lot of valuable knowledge about the challenges of engaging both parents in the process of resolution and it will continue to inform debates about the future of practice among family law professionals for some time to come.”

9. Key learnings

Family Matters was a ground-breaking project that piloted the concept of a new type of dispute resolution practitioner. Key learnings from the development and delivery of the project were identified in Dr Skinner’s research (Skinner and Forster 2015) and included the following:

- **In a post-LAPSO world, the number of parents seeking legal advice in relation to their separation has significantly dropped.** Referrals to the project from solicitors were lower than expected and, as a result, recruitment of participants took more time than had originally been anticipated (with referrals from other support organisations such as Citizens Advice playing a key role).

- **Explaining the role of a Family Matters Guide to parents was more challenging than expected.** Parents had misconceptions about the role of the Guide, which may have been exacerbated in some cases due to the hosting of Family Matters within local law firms. However, being located in host firms was perceived to be an advantage because it gave credibility and a quality mark to the service, was a workable and cost-effective business model, and was an appropriate environment for parents.

- **Family Matters Guides were able to provide a unique blend of legal knowledge and mediation skills.** This ensured they worked with parents in a way that empowered them to navigate their way through a situation that could seem overwhelming.

- **The impartiality of the Family Matters Guide was a unique element of the role.** It allowed the Guides to work with both parents and take account of both perspectives, unlike a lawyer who would have to follow a client’s direction and act on their behalf.

- **The legal knowledge of the Family Matters Guides was vital.** Particularly, in relation to safeguarding children.

- **Early intervention of a service like Family Matters can make a real difference.** It can stop situations spiralling out of control and can help in getting some couples ‘mediation ready’. Without the early support of Family Matters, they may not have been ready for mediation.
• **Working jointly with both parents is not always desirable to those involved.** For many reasons, people may choose not to join a meeting with their partner but in working separately with both parties and acting as a go-between, Family Matters Guides were able to ensure an agreement could be reached.

• **Adopting a professional principle of impartiality can be a good idea.** If the direction of future practice is to work more collaboratively with parents, then impartiality may help in engaging both parents to assist them in resolving disputes.

“Extremely professional, helpful, understanding, therapeutic… I was so grateful as I felt lost. I felt supported.”
10. Summary and next steps

The evidence presented demonstrates that Family Matters provided an innovative and highly successful service to vulnerable and disadvantaged parents who would otherwise have had nowhere to go for support with their separation. Over the course of 2.5 years, Family Matters Guides played a critical role in enabling thousands of separating parents to reach an agreement that had the best result for their family.

In the period September 2015 to January 2016, Resolution submitted several applications for funding for the continuation and development of Family Matters. These applications were unsuccessful, so we have been unable to continue the Family Matters service.

However, we secured funding to build on the joint research with Christine Skinner at York University. Through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account (IAA), we will be able to use the skills and expertise of Dr Skinner to embed the learning from the Family Matters practice model into Resolution’s future strategy. This work will take place in the summer and autumn of 2016.

“Very helpful...they really listened… I now have more direction.”
Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to discuss what might help you best to resolve things with your partner/former partner and for you all as a family.

You may know that people are being recommended and encouraged to consider resolving matters between them without going to Court.

This is because Courts can struggle to find solutions that suit the whole family and that reduce the conflict between former partners, especially if they are parents. This decision-making can take a long time and increase stress on everyone involved.

*Family Matters* is a service designed to help you to think through what might be available to help you and to give you any other information that can move you forward.

**This Action Plan is in two parts:**

- **The first part is for us to find out as much about you, your situation and what you hope to get out of Family Matters.**
  
  Family Matters is provided free of charge to separated or separating parents who are eligible for the service. It is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) as part of their Innovation Fund. We want to find out how the service is working and who it is helping, so we ask you a few questions about your situation to help us with this. If you have difficulty understanding any of these questions, or are not sure how they relate to you, please ask your Family Matters Guide for help. If there are any questions you don’t want to answer, other than your name and contact details, please feel free to say so.

- **The second part of the Action Plan is for us to start recording your actions: what we have agreed each of us will do to achieve your goals.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOR OFFICE USE ONLY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Client ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paired client ID (if relevant)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## About you and your family

Please use tick boxes to record your replies to the questions.

### About you

1. **Name**
   - First name: 
   - Surname: 

2. **Address**
   - House/flat number: 
   - Block: 
   - Street: 
   - Area: 
   - Town/city: 
   - Postcode: 

3. **Phone number/email address**
   - Home: 
   - Work: 
   - Mobile: 
   - Email address: 

Do you want us to keep your contact details confidential from your former partner/the other parent? If so, please tick ☐ yes
4. Your age group

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Under 25 [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>15 - 17 [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>18 - 24 [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>25 - 34 [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>35 - 44 [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>45 - 54 [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>55 - 64 [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>65+ [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Prefer not to say [ ]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. Gender

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Male [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Female [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Prefer not to say [ ]</td>
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</table>

6. Ethnic background

**White**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Irish [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Gypsy or Irish Traveller [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Any other White background [ ]</td>
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</table>

**Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>White and Black Caribbean [ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. White and Black African

7. White and Asian

8. Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background

Asian / Asian British

9. Indian

10. Pakistani

11. Bangladeshi

12. Chinese

13. Any other Asian background

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

14. African

15. Caribbean

16. Any other Black / African / Caribbean background

Other ethnic group

17. Arab

18. European

19. Any other ethnic group

Prefer not to say

7. Any qualifications you have (tick all that apply)

1. Degree, degree equivalent, Higher Education qualification below degree level

2. 'A' levels, level 3 NVQs, or equivalent

3. Trade apprenticeship

4. GCSE/O level grade A*-C, CSE grade 1, level 2 NVQ or equivalent
5. GCSE/O level grade D-G, CSE grade 2-5, level 1 NVQ or equivalent
   - [ ]

6. Any other qualification
   - [ ]

7. No qualification
   - [ ]

8. Prefer not to say
   - [ ]

---

8. Do you have any long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness or disability?

By long-standing I mean anything that has affected you for over 12 months or is likely to affect you for at least 12 months.

1. Yes
   - [ ]

2. No
   - [ ]

3. Prefer not to say
   - [ ]

---

9. Are you currently:

1. Employed full time (30 hours per week or more)
   - [ ]

2. Employed part time (less than 30 hours per week)
   - [ ]

3. Self employed full time (30 hours per week or more)
   - [ ]

4. Self-employed part time (less than 30 hours per week)
   - [ ]

5. Looking after the children full time
   - [ ]

6. Retired
   - [ ]

7. Student
   - [ ]

8. Unemployed and looking for work
   - [ ]

9. Other
   - [ ]

10. Prefer not to say
    - [ ]
About your household - can you tell me:

10. What is your total household income?

By income we mean your salary and/or a partner’s salary (after tax) and/or any benefits.

Please give either a weekly or monthly or annual figure - whichever is easiest - you don’t need to give all of them.

1. Weekly
2. Monthly
Prefer not to say

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income per week</th>
<th>Income per week</th>
<th>Income per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. £0 – £49</td>
<td>1. £0 - £199</td>
<td>1. £0 - £2,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. £50 - £99</td>
<td>2. £200 - £399</td>
<td>2. £2,400 - £4,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. £100 - £299</td>
<td>3. £400 - £1,199</td>
<td>3. £4,800 - £14,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. £300 - £499</td>
<td>4. £1,200 - £1,999</td>
<td>4. £14,400 - £23,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. £500 - £999</td>
<td>5. £2,000 - £3,999</td>
<td>5. £24,000 - £47,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Don’t know</td>
<td>6. Don’t know</td>
<td>6. Don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Prefer not to say</td>
<td>7. Prefer not to say</td>
<td>7. Prefer not to say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Your family and relationships**

*Family Matters* has been set up to help separated parents to work better together. Please tell us about your separation so that we can plan similar projects in the future.

### 11. Have you used any of these forms of help and support while you were separating, or after you separated? (tick all that apply)

1. Legal help
2. Family Courts
3. Counselling
4. Mediation
5. Addiction services
6. Any parenting apart classes
7. Other - please say what:
8. None – apart from this project

### 12. Who have you contacted to help you during or after separation? (tick all that apply)

1. Child Support Agency (CSA) or Child Maintenance Service (CMS)
2. Child Maintenance Options
3. Family Courts
4. CAFCASS
5. Relate
6. Gingerbread
7. Citizen’s Advice
8. Doctor/Health Visitor
9. Family Lives
10. Agony aunts

11. Solicitors

12. A religious organisation (e.g. church, mosque etc.)

13. Family and friends

14. Online advice or support site (which one)?

15. Other please say who:

16. No one – apart from this project
**Relationship with ex-partner**

These questions are about the relationship you have come to this project about. If you are now in a new relationship, please remember these questions are about your *ex-partner*, NOT your new partner.

13. Please tick the number which you think best describes your current situation with your ex-partner:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Married and still living together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In a same-sex civil partnership and still living together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Still living together (not married)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>In a relationship but not married or living together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Separated, but still legally married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Divorced, or same-sex civil partnership is now dissolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>We were never in a relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. How long have you been/were you together?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Never a couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>More than 6 months but less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>More than 1 year but less than 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>More than 2 years but less than 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15. How many children do you have from this relationship?

By children we mean someone 18 or under years old  □

Please list the ages of each child:  □  □  □  □  □  □  □  □  □

Please list below the names of your children and any special needs they have:

Name of your (ex) partner:

Please give us details of any proceedings or Court applications that you have made or are considering:

Did you make the Court application?

1. Yes  □

2. No  □

If you are still together with your partner please finish here. Thank you for your help.
If you are no longer together please complete the rest of the questions.

16. How long have you been apart from your ex-partner?

1. Less than 6 months  
2. More than 6 months but less than 1 year  
3. More than 1 year but less than 5 years  
4. More than 5 years  
5. Prefer not to say  

17. Thinking about your children with your ex-partner, please tick one of the following which you think best describes your current situation.

1. I am the main day to day carer  
2. I am not the main day to day carer  
3. We share care between us  
4. The children live with someone else (e.g. grandparents)  
5. Prefer not to say  

18. Do you have an arrangement for your children that you and your ex-partner have agreed together?

By arrangement we mean one which might be formally written down or just informally agreed between the two of you. It might include:

- Contact
- Payments for the support of children – regular or not always regular such as school fees, holidays, pocket money
- Non-financial contributions e.g. clothes or contributing to child care arrangements
- Shared care
- Or any combination of the above
Please tick one below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Yes</th>
<th>2. No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

19. If you said YES – how happy are you with this arrangement? Please tick one answer:

|---------------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|

20. Do you currently have a statutory child maintenance arrangement with the Child Support Agency (CSA) or Child Maintenance Service (CMS)? (Include any arrangements even if they are not working.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Yes</th>
<th>2. No</th>
<th>3. Prefer not to say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
# Thinking about relationships now

21. Please tick one of the following which you think best describes your current situation:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Single no partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Have a new partner – but not living together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Living with a new partner but not married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Married with a new partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>In a same sex civil partnership with a new partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Separated from a new partner, but still legally married/in a civil partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Divorced from a new partner/civil partnership with a same-sex partner is now dissolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Widowed from a new partner/civil partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Was in a same-sex civil partnership which is now legally dissolved or separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**ONLY ANSWER THIS IF IN THE LAST QUESTION YOU SAID YOU ARE IN A NEW RELATIONSHIP AND LIVING WITH YOUR NEW PARTNER**

22. Please tick one of the following which best describes YOUR PARTNER’S current employment situation:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Employed full time (30 hours per week or more)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Employed part time (less than 30 hours per week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Self employed full time (30 hours per week or more)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Self-employed part time (less than 30 hours per week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Looking after the children full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Unemployed and looking for work  
9. Other  
10. Prefer not to say  

ONLY ANSWER THIS IF YOU ARE IN A NEW RELATIONSHIP AND LIVING WITH YOUR PARTNER

23. Do you have any other children living with you that are from your new relationship and/or from your new partner’s former relationship?

1. Yes  
2. No  
3. Prefer not to say  
What do you need help with?

In this part, we ask you to tell us about:

• what it is you would like help with
• what you think might help you most, and
• what you would like to get out of working with a Family Matters Guide

There may be lots of things you need help with. This diagram gives a few examples. Please tick or ring those you would like us to support you with. Don’t worry if the things that are uppermost on your list are not here.

Please write here the three most urgent or important matters you would like help with. Again, don’t worry if you don’t have three:

1. 
2. 
3.
Your feelings

We list below the some of the range of feelings and worries people often experience at a time when their relationship may be in difficulties. Please tick or ring those which you think may apply to you.

If there are others, please list them on the sheet.

This information will be entirely confidential between you and your guide.
Is there anything else that you’re feeling or anything else you’d like your Family Matters Guide to know?
Your permission to be contacted by someone evaluating the project

We would like to ask for your help in giving feedback about how well this project is doing. This project is funded by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). To make sure it is working well, DWP have commissioned a research company to gather some information about Family Matters and to ask for your views about how well it is meeting your needs.

Your name and contact details will not be supplied to DWP. Any information you provide will be held in the strictest of confidence and will be handled securely throughout the study both by our project and by the research company following DWP security guidelines. This information will be used for research and analysis purposes only by the contractor.

Do you agree that the information you have just provided on the form called About You and Your Family can be sent to the research company?

Yes  □

No □

Do you agree that the research company can contact you to talk to you about your experiences on this project?

Yes  □

No □

If you have any questions about the research ask your project representative.

Print name: 

Signature:  

Date:  
Your action plan

This section will be completed by the Family Guide after your meeting and you will be given or sent a copy so that you have a record of what you have agreed should happen next.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of first meeting:</th>
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<th>Priorities agreed (summary – list in bullet points)</th>
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<th>Priorities agreed (detail)</th>
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## Actions for you and for your Family Matters Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>What needs to be done</th>
<th>Who needs to be contacted</th>
<th>Who will do it – you or your Guide?</th>
<th>By when</th>
<th>Tick when complete</th>
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Family Matters: our agreement with you

| Your Family Matters Guide is: |   |
| Your name: |   |
| Your National Insurance number: |   |

By signing this form you are confirming that:

- You have read the information on pages 2 to 3 and agree to those terms
- You receive a state benefit other than or in addition to child benefit or your income is not above the living wage.

| Signed: |   |
| Date: |   |
1. What your Family Matters Guide will do

   a) Your family Matters Guide will help you identify your own needs, those of the other parent and in particular those of your child/children.

   b) They will offer you support with the practical, legal and emotional issues you face, by helping you to develop a plan that addresses these issues. Typically, a plan might list the decisions you face, along with possible sources of support. They will ensure you and the other parent can both access the most appropriate help from other agencies.

   c) They will work with you and the other parent to ensure you can communicate together to resolve your issues in the best interests of your child/children.

   d) They will provide support both you and the other parent can trust throughout the process that better enables you to process information and take the next step.

   e) Your Family Matters Guide is impartial. They can work with you independently or together with the other parent. They will seek to help both you and the other parent equally, impartially and in a way that best meets the needs of you all as a family.

   f) Your family Matters Guide will provide legal and financial information in an impartial and balanced way to help you understand the options available to you.

2. What your Family Matters Guide will not do

   a) Your Family Matters Guide cannot assist you if s/he has prior knowledge of your situation, through previous involvement with either you or the other parent as a solicitor, counsellor or in any other professional role. If any other conflict or perceived conflict of interest is identified s/he will not be able to continue to assist you.

   b) Your Family Matters Guide does not make judgments or express opinions about who may be right or wrong, nor does s/he take sides.

   c) Your Family Matters Guide cannot provide legal or financial advice.
3. Your confidentiality

All information including correspondence from either of you will be shared openly with you both. The only exceptions to this are:

a) An address or telephone number or other information which either of you wishes to be kept confidential.

b) Where any person (particularly a child) is at risk of serious harm, your Family Matters Guide has a duty to contact the appropriate authorities.

c) Exceptionally, personal data may be disclosed in connection with the alleged or established commission of an unlawful act.

d) Under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998, we ask that you consent to us processing your personal data for the purposes of us assisting you under this project. You understand that this includes us retaining and storing your personal data for as long as is necessary in connection with this Agreement. We may retain data for research and statistical purposes but it will be anonymised so that you can’t be personally identified.

e) For the purposes of quality assurance we monitor our performance. Periodically, Resolution may have sight of files and data, but access is strictly controlled and on a similar confidential basis.

4. What we do with data

a) Resolution collects customer data to evaluate the service being delivered. This information will be anonymised and used for research and analytical purposes only. Your information will be securely stored, used and shared in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

b) An independent research organisation commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will analyse this data to determine whether our service is helping separated families to collaborate in the best interests of their children. Resolution will share your personal details (name and telephone number) with the DWP’s independent evaluators for research purposes. The independent evaluators will treat the data in strict confidence and will not share it with the DWP.

c) You may be also contacted by the independent research organisation to discuss your experience of using this service. If you are contacted we hope you will
participate, however you may decline to participate in further discussion or surveys if you wish.

5. Concerns or complaints

We hope that this project will assist you. Any concern you may have about the work of your Family Matters Guide or the service provided should be referred to your Family Matters Guide. If s/he is unable to resolve this with you directly or otherwise, any complaint you have will be considered through Resolution’s complaints procedure. Please let your Family Matters Guide know if you would like a copy of the Complaints Leaflet and s/he will be happy to provide this to you.
Support for separating parents

If you are splitting up, the Family Matters service will help you to:

- Work through any problems you are facing and help find solutions
- Get through your break-up in a way that will cause as little disruption as possible to your children
- Help you access the information and support that meets your particular needs.

Please get in touch if you, or someone you know, would benefit from this service.

How to contact us

familymatters.oxford@resolution.org.uk
01865 406 038 or 01865 406 009

Resolution Family Matters
c/o Turpin & Miller LLP
1 Agnes Court
Oxford Road
Oxford
OX4 2EW

Buses 1, 5 and 10 stop at the junction between Oxford Road and Marsh Road travelling in each direction.

Parking available

@FamilyMattersOx

resolution.org.uk/familymatters
What is Family Matters?

Splitting up or getting divorced can be one of the most difficult and stressful events a family can go through. It’s easy to feel swamped or confused about what to do next. Family Matters can help you get the support and information you need, so you can do what’s best for you and your family.

How does the service work?

Your Guide will work with you on your own or with you together with your ex. They are based in a local law firm, details of which can be found on the back of this leaflet.

Your Guide will use their skills and expert understanding of the law and legal system to help you work through issues you’re dealing with. They will also help you access additional support such as advice on debt or housing.

You will see the same person throughout the process, and they will work at a pace that suits you and your family.

Who is the service for?

Family Matters is for parents going through a break-up or parents who are already apart. It’s for couples who were together for years or just a short time.

You can use the service even if your ex doesn’t want to.

The service is free if at least one of you receives a state benefit OR earns an income equivalent to, or less than, the UK living wage (£7.65 per hour as at April 2014, source: livingwage.org.uk).

If you’re unsure about whether you qualify, please contact us using the details on the back of this leaflet.

How much does the service cost?

Nothing - it’s free providing you meet the criteria below.

What parents say about us

“Making my options clear has been a massive help”

“Guides are trained lawyers and mediators experienced at supporting separating families.”

“It’s a chance to explore the issues relating to your separation such as children, your home or money.”

“You might have practical issues you need to agree with your ex, such as arrangements for your children over weekends and holidays.”

“Every couple is unique and will have their own set of needs, questions and concerns.”

“The service is confidential: your information will not be shared with anyone else without your permission.”

“My opinion was valued and it helped us find a solution to our problems”

“I feel so much more relieved and reassured since speaking to my Family Matters Guide”

“I am happy now that there is a positive action plan in place”

“You gave me hope”

“Making my options clear has been a massive help”