



# Equal Parenting Alliance News

April 2007

## Campaign News

As you hopefully already know, on the 3rd May we are standing a Scottish MSP Parliamentary candidate in the Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley constituency near Glasgow and also an English local government candidate in Runnymede. Surrey.

The Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley constituency, in Ayrshire, is currently held by the New Labour incumbent Cathy Jamieson. Our candidate will be Ray Barry.



Ray Barry  
Our MSP  
candidate  
in Scotland

### How Are We Doing So Far?

We're very pleased with the way the campaign is going so far.

Already we've had our campaign leaflet delivered through the front door of every household (over forty thousand homes) in an entire region in Scotland. (something no UK parenting campaign group has ever done before!)

We have featured on the front-page of the *Ayrshire Post*, been in the *Scottish Sun* and had statements printed in five other local papers.



Ray is also being interviewed by the BBC in Glasgow on Thursday.

We are also leafleting in the constituency with local supporters in the last two weeks of the campaign.

We don't think this is bad at all, especially when you consider this has all

"Thanks very much to everyone who has already made a donation towards our election fund, but there's still time if you haven't had a chance yet! Just go to: [www.equal-parenting-scotland.com](http://www.equal-parenting-scotland.com) and click on the "Donate" link near the top of the page. Even a couple of pounds is a big help, and if you can spare a bit more it's even more helpful."

been for a basic investment of just 1100 pounds for the deposit and leaflet printing.

Of course, we are not a 'normal' party in the sense we have a realistic hope of getting elected. Our campaign is more about raising awareness of the issues and publicity than it is about votes.

We hope to persuade the people who may be sympathetic to us, to give us their vote as a show of support for the rights of children and family law reform.

But, at the end of the day. the main part of our campaign is already done with our leaflet and publicity. Any votes we get are a bonus!

It's an unusual experiment we are doing. How many people care enough about these issues to vote for a candidate who doesn't even live in their constituency (or country)? We have no idea.

But we will find out on the 3rd May!

For more campaign news, see: [www.equal-parenting-scotland.com](http://www.equal-parenting-scotland.com)

### PLUS!

**CSA Reforms** - We submitted our proposals for reform of the CSA. with a fairer, cheaper system that puts the interest of children first.

**The Fight Against Apathy** - I am reminded of when the British Apathy Society had their very successful AGM...

**Media** - We have established a presence as an *opinion former* on the politics.co.uk site.

**EPA Curry Night** - a jolly evening was had by all, we'll be arranging another one soon.

**New Regional Groups** - to give us some form of 'local' presence for more of our members.

MEDIA

**Equal Parenting Alliance on politics.co.uk**

We have taken out a subscription to the [politics.co.uk](http://politics.co.uk) website, which features political parties and pressure groups.

This means we become an 'opinion former', sharing the same status as FNF and the Labour Party.

The main advantage to this site is that it is visited by politicians, their researchers and journalists looking for easy stories. So by appearing on politics.co.uk we hope to increase our profile before these groups.

A feature of politics.co.uk that we expect to make best use of is publishing our press releases. Currently we send our press releases to the media, but basically they are ignored. Each time we send a press release to politics.co.uk it will be

featured on their front page under the "Latest Press Releases" heading. This should substantially improve our visibility.

Luckily we were able to negotiate a substantial discount on their normal fee of £185 per month, so we'll see how it goes and review whether we are getting value for money in six months time. (Most of this subscription cost has been funded by generous donations).

It was a toss up between subscribing on this site or getting some car stickers made. We decided the web would be more effective advertising for the party at our current state of awareness.

Our site went live on December 1st 2006 and is attracting quite a lot of hits to our main site.

*We had the following letter published in the Guardian on the 2nd November:*

By asking "does a 50/50 split of caring post-separation represent justice?", Richard Collier and Sally Sheldon demonstrate a widespread misunderstanding of family law reform (Unfamiliar territory, Society, November 1).

A call for equal treatment for parents after separation is not the same as a call for an exact 50/50 split of care. After all, few "normal" parents share care exactly 50/50, but nobody would say they should not be regarded as equal parents.

Similarly, the call for a "presumption of contact" reflects the fact that both parents are entitled to contact with their children when together - but not just after they have separated. Everyone agrees that it's best for children to maintain reasonable contact with both parents after separation, but under family law the "starting point" for contact is 100/0. We believe the "starting point" should indeed be equality, but the exact share decided in the best interests of the children involved.

Phil Else  
Equal Parenting Alliance Party Leader

**Contributions Welcome**

Although this newsletter is designed principally to tell our members and supporters what we've been doing, we'd welcome contributions from members for publication. Although standards are very high (that's a joke by the way!) send any contributions by email to:

[newsletter@equalparentingalliance.com](mailto:newsletter@equalparentingalliance.com)

**Can You Help Campaign?**

If you'd like to help our campaign by leafleting in Scotland or Runnymede, please phone either:

- Ray 0790 550 2856 or
- Steve 0790 965 6735

**Launch of Regional Groups**

We are re-organising our membership base into groups to give a more local presence.

We intend to arrange a social event in each region in the next few months so that members in each region can meet us and each other.



- Scotland
- Northern
- Midlands
- Southern

Obviously, we can hardly claim these groups are 'local' in any true sense of the word, but it's a lot better than one group covering the entire country!

Members will shortly be receiving an email letting them know details of when and where their local groups will meet up. In the meantime you can check our web site where details of your regional coordinator will be shown.

## CSA REFORMS

Whatever the first letter that drops through the letterbox from the CSA actually says, this is probably the letter the recipient is going to read

Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
London  
SW1H 9DA

Dear Mrs X,

Your child has been removed from your care, without notice and through no fault of your own.

However, you are required by law to fulfil your responsibilities towards your child, so please remit £45.26 to me weekly from now on.

Failure to do so will cause me to remove your passport and driving license. I will also be pleased to publicly humiliate you and your child by naming and shaming you on a website for absent parents.

Of course, should you wish to see your child again, you have the right to make an application for contact through the courts. But please understand - we are not interested in whether your child ever sees you again - we just require you to pay.

Have a nice day.

Yours sincerely,

John Hutton

New Labour Secretary of State  
Dept for Work & Pensions

We believe this highlights the failure of the approach the CSA and government take. The system is not fair, and without being fair it will never work.

**Our proposals would replace the CSA with a system that is simpler, fairer, harder to evade, cheaper to implement and - most importantly - better for the children it should be designed to benefit.**

We don't have space for our complete proposals here, but if you want to read them go to [www.equalparentingalliance.com](http://www.equalparentingalliance.com) and click on "Publications". Here is a summary of what we proposed for replacing the CSA.

It is generally agreed that the CSA was a failure.

We are concerned the reasons for the failure will not be understood by the government which - without acknowledging the real reasons - is destined to repeat the same mistakes again.

We have designed our proposals from the outset to benefit children who live apart from one of their parents. All the evidence suggests that children are better off - and have more successful lives as

adults - if they have a good relationship with both their parents, even after separation.

We believe the first question that should be asked when replacing the CSA is "How can we help the children of separated parents maintain an effective parental relationship with their separated parent?".

The CSA unintentionally promotes almost the exact opposite - by encouraging resident parents to block separated parents from parenting their children.

We believe, that by concentrating only on collecting as much money as possible, involvement of the CSA leads to unintended and harmful side-effects for children. These effects will continue - and possibly be made even worse - by the proposals in this white paper.

The essence of our proposals is that a simple flat-rate monthly payment by non-resident parents replaces the existing complex bureaucracy of the CSA.

We believe the side-effects of our proposals would be a reduction in conflict between parents - and improved co-operation as they would be encouraged to share their parental roles more equally.

Reducing conflict between separated parents is not just a *nice-to-have* feature of our plan - it is a key outcome - and would benefit children far more profoundly than arbitrarily taking money from one parent.

We believe the replacement scheme (C-MEC) outlined in the white paper, while improving on the CSA by leaving more parents to make their own arrangements, will repeat (and compound) most of the same mistakes.

In devising a system almost guaranteed to reduce co-operation - and increase conflict - between separated parents, the government have shown exactly the same lack of vision and understanding exhibited by the original CSA. Indeed, we believe that C-MEC will make things *worse* for the children of separated parents than even the CSA has done.

Ultimately, by attaching no more than a monetary value to the parenting of a child, the government are demonstrating their contempt for the potential benefits of non-resident parents (mostly fathers, of course) having a shared parental relationship with their children.

The government reveal, through their approach to the CSA/C-MEC, that they truly know the price of everything, but the value of nothing.

## THE BACK PAGE

### RADICAL EPA!

It seems to me, that of all the groups calling for reform of family law, it's only the EPA and the Grandparents Action Group ([www.gaguk.net](http://www.gaguk.net)) who have really got the measure of the current openness 'reforms' the government is promoting.

Their proposals (which are probably a 'done deal' despite the consultation exercise) are not going to work, and worse, they're going to let the government and judiciary off the hook.

As far as I'm concerned, we are the only two groups to have submitted proposals that actually will lead to openness and accountability in the family courts.

When we started this party last year, I never thought we'd end up being more radical than everyone else. Of course, we may be wrong, but it seems to me we are the only group prepared or able to do fresh thinking about these issues at the moment.



Some local Manchester members enjoying a meal on the famous "Curry Mile" in Rusholme

### APATHY RULES OK

Thinking of the movement as a whole I am sadly reminded of a Monty Python joke about the British Apathy Society AGM, which went something like:

*The British Apathy Society are pleased to report this year's highly successful Annual General Meeting in the Albert Hall. We were delighted to see that not a single member (or anyone from the committee) bothered to turn up. We'd like to thank all our members for their lack of interest in this event. We hope we can maintain this very high standard of apathy throughout next year.*

It's not just me is it? I'm sure there is a growing tide of apathy within the ranks of activists and supporters of children's (and father's) rights for reform of family law.

Some have just plain given up, (although actually, continuing the Monty Python theme, maybe they're *resting*)

Others have moved onto other things, perhaps put off by constant infighting (within and between groups) and the overall lack of progress.

Many more are simply exhausted, or destitute, or just don't know what to do next. *How* to get change when the last few years have come to nothing?

If the last few years of protest *have* got nowhere (which is arguably true of course) then surely this just shows we have to find *another* approach – a different way to get the message across?

There's no point in constantly banging your head against the same brick wall.

Instead, it's sensible to try something else; go round the side of the wall, chemically dissolve the mortar, use a ladder to climb over it. Find ways to get past the wall without tackling it head-on.

This is where the EPA is different. Our approach through politics gives us a unique platform within the movement; being a political party opens some doors - and closes others. We hope that, especially at election time, any extra publicity and interest we gain will give us an advantage.

We're neither so arrogant or so bold to suggest that everyone should join the EPA, but we're convinced we are a *complementary part* of the solution. We need involvement of the other groups, just like they need us.

We have just a couple of years to get organised.

This is not time for apathy. This is the time to find a new way through the wall..