



Equal Parenting Alliance

July 2006

A Personal Welcome from the Party Leader



Phil Else, Party Leader

Dear Friends

Firstly, may I welcome all of you to the Equal Parenting Alliance.

I am glad that more and more people are seeing the political approach as a valid way of advancing the Children's Rights campaign.

Combined with the support services of such organisations as Families Need Fathers, UK Fathers and Dads UK, and the more controversial activities of Real Fathers and F4J, we can add our effort to the issue, and turn it into a Movement that the politicians and judges will be forced to listen to, and respect.

Our theme this year is awareness, and if you turn to the second page of this newsletter, you will see that this is the first stage of our initial four-year campaign. We hope to raise awareness of our Party, and also of the message we are hoping to spread throughout society and the equal parenting Movement.

The message that all of us need to deal with is that of unity. Our opponents are very cohesive: they have standards texts and terminology they use, they latch onto each other's buzzwords, happily misuse each other's survey and research, and they do it in the calm and common-sense way that makes the ordinary people of the UK (i.e. those whose lives are not blighted by the Family Courts) feel they are speaking sense.

We'd like to welcome Phil Else as our new party leader after our committee re-organised for personal reasons. Our previous leader and chairman swapped roles and the deputy leader, Pete Molloy, stepped down from the committee.

We'd like to thank Pete for all his hard work during the first few months of the party.

Currently the equal parenting campaign is disparate guerrilla army, formed of over 35 differing organisations of varying size, each with their own injuries, their own way of fighting the war, and many of whom refuse to get on with any other equal parenting organisation. I often think of "The People's Front of Judea", but unfortunately, the truth is not so funny.

We need to become unified: not under a single organisation or chief, but as a Movement. We need letter-writing and research organisations standing side by side with self-help and direct action organisations. We need a campaign that will physically move the country in the right direction, by convincing the public of our veracity as parents and proving that the system harms our, (and maybe one day their), children.

Over the course of the next six months we will be talking individually to the various organisations to see how we can help each other, with a view to working with all of them.

Then we will all be on the road to success.

News In Brief

Victory at Durham Union - Steve spoke at Durham Union debating society for the motion "This house supports the father's rights movement" and won with an overwhelming majority.

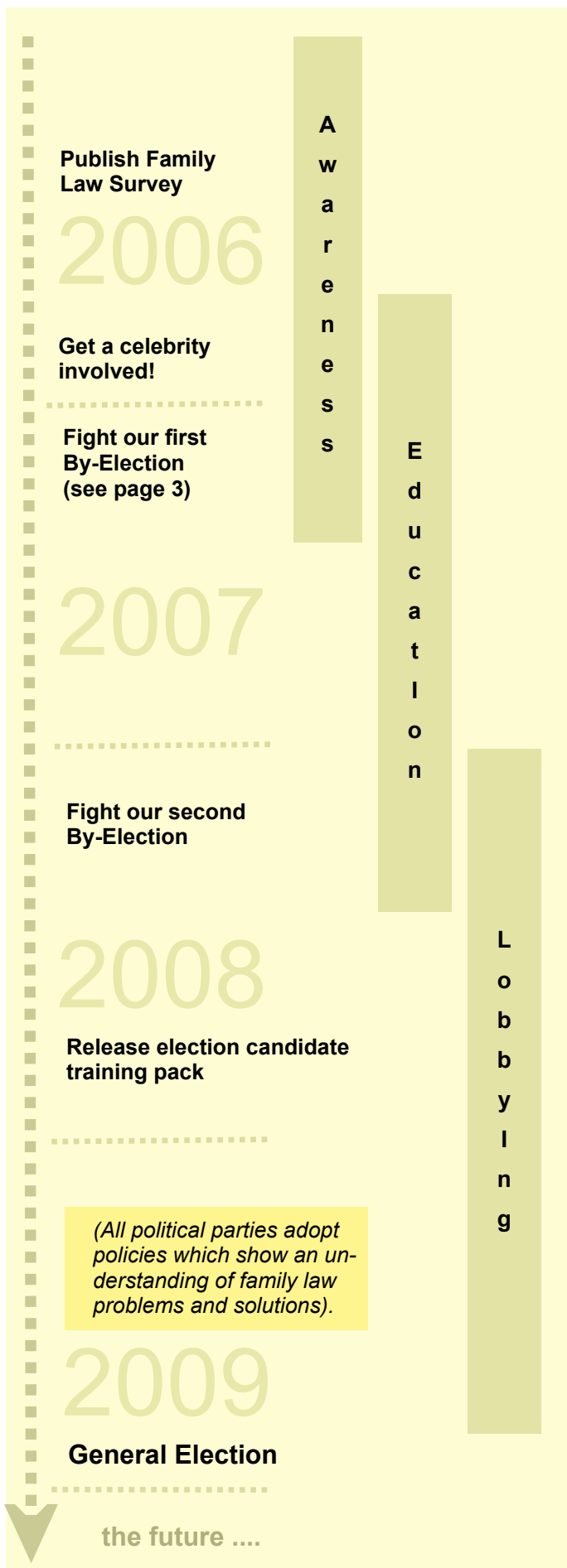
United Equal Parenting Conference - Phil spoke at this conference, which was held in London on Saturday 17th June, and described where we see the Equal Parenting Alliance fitting into the movement. It was generally agreed that this conference had been worthwhile by everyone who

attended, and we hope to see a follow-up event next year.

Methodist Church - Phil gave a well received presentation to local ministers from the Methodist church in Glossop on the 26th of April.

EPA Membership fees have been reduced - see back page for full details.

LONG-TERM PLAN



Awareness - making the public and media (and other political parties) aware of our existence and what we stand for.

Our family law survey will mark the start of our education and awareness campaign by giving us difficult questions to ask the government and judiciary.

Celebrity Involvement - Like it or not, our popular culture only listens when someone with celebrity status shows interest. We'd like to get someone involved with us..

When we are ready we intend to fight the first suitable by-election for an MP. This will give us valuable experience, increase our public profile considerably and provides us with the opportunity to get our message to an entire constituency. (See article on page 3).

Education - we think the issues in family law that need changing have never been properly explained to the public. We believe this *has* to be done before the campaign can progress further.

Building on the experience gained from our first election, we hope to improve on everything about our first campaign.

About a year before the general election, we hope to have gained enough experience in supporting candidates to be able to offer help and advice to anyone who would like to stand as a candidate – provided they are standing on a compatible pro-children ticket.

Lobbying - Once the issues are better understood by the electorate and politicians, we will challenge the parties to answer the difficult questions in family law that (up till now) they have always managed to side-step.

Of course, we are in no better position than anyone else to predict the date of the next general election, but we're currently working on the assumption that Labour will go to the polls after four years in office.

We plan to be fielding as many candidates in our target seats as we can afford.

LONG TERM PLAN

Thoughts on our first By-Election

As you can see, we plan to fight at least two by-elections before the next general election.

So how much will this cost?

Before the last general election various figures were floated around, sometimes quoting costs up to £100,000 to fight each seat. However, we believe this was deliberate disinformation put about to justify inaction and the failure to mount an effective political campaign.

While this figure may indeed be the sum one of the *big-three* spend on an election, of course we could not begin to spend anything like that.

Rather, we have to look at the minimum possible cost, and then work out how much added value we get out of any extra amount we spend.

So what would the minimum worthwhile campaign entail and how much would it cost?

The basic cost to put up a candidate for MP is the £500 deposit needed to get on the election ticket. (You forfeit this if you get less than 5% of the votes cast, so we expect to write the deposit off at this stage!).

When you stand for election as an MP, the Post Office, by law, has to deliver one election publication per candidate to every household in the constituency (or to every constituent by name) for free. This is a major benefit to us, and indeed part of the justification for running a campaign at all.

With the average constituency of around thirty thousand households, this represents about £7,000 worth of postage. Not bad for a £500 investment.

Of course, we pay for the leaflets and envelopes ourselves, so a costing for our basic election so far is deposit (£500) + 30,000 A4 B&W leaflets (£600) + envelopes (£150) = £1250 in total.

So, at a bare minimum, we could do nothing else for the campaign and still have our leaflet in every house in the constituency *and* a candidate under our name on the ballot paper for a touch over one thousand pounds.

We would also need some on-ground support, which is why choosing a campaign where we have local members would be very important at first.

This probably means our first seat fought will be in north west England.

Clearly, we would never be in the market for a smoothly oiled publicity machine, chartering helicopters and painted buses. But what we would expect to do is have groups of volunteers leafletting and chatting to people in the constituency in the month leading up to the campaign, concentrating mostly on the final week.

Most of the actual 'campaigning' would consist of this leafletting to promote awareness, and the candidate him/her self would hopefully be able to get coverage on local radio at least.

Although a dedicated 'election office' would be nice, we don't believe it would be essential or give us value for money.

Ideally the candidate could be available for much of that month, or on the ground for at least the whole of the final week. (Of course, we have to find a candidate as well, but that's another story!).

Apart from some travel costs, there would not be too many other costs associated with this style of campaign. Our hope is we can run a minimal frugal style campaign like this for about £2000 a seat.

Although this may sound disappointingly as if we are not being very optimistic, we won't aim higher until we have both the funds and member base in place to support anything more elaborate.

We firmly believe in planning for what we think we can realistically achieve.

Even with this type of campaign, we still think it's worthwhile. Every one in an entire town can read what we really stand for, and we can hopefully challenge the other candidates to address family law issues more sensibly by our presence.

Our first election will be an experiment. By the time we run our second we will have better idea of what works and how to fight the bigger challenges ahead.

Our value in being a political party is not simply about maximising the number of votes cast for us. It's more about using the party and election paraphernalia to allow us to punch above our weight – and getting our true message to the masses at last.

THE BACK PAGE

Membership Fees

We have decided to slash the cost of becoming a member of the Equal Parenting Alliance.

Membership will now be just five pounds a year.

We've decided to do this as membership is less than we hoped, and – quite simply – we think it's better for us to have more members than to have more money. Our influence can only grow as people get involved.

We realise it would be only natural for existing members (who were asked to pay twenty pounds) to feel they have over-paid, so in compensation we will automatically extend their membership for another year.

We hope this change will mean more people join, certainly a lot of people have told us they

would join if it cost less. If this is truly the barrier stopping people joining, we hope this will eliminate it.

Of course, we hope any increase in membership will, in time, bring in the same amount of money in the long run.

In any case, though a healthy bank balance gives us more options, we will not start to need big-bucks until we mount campaigns for by-elections, which we expect to cost a minimum of £2000 per campaign.

We'd also like to remind you we have a policy of open-ness in the organisation. Any member may request a copy of the accounts, to see where the money is going, at any time.

Family Law Surveys

Our first Family Law Survey will be released in the next few weeks. We're actually planning three surveys:

- 1 Aimed at people involved as applicant or respondent in family law cases. This will allow us to answer questions such as "What percentage of applicants say that false allegations of abuse were made against them by the respondent?". This information just isn't collected or available anywhere else.
- 2 Aimed at adults whose parents were arguing in the family courts over their custody or contact. We think it's vitally important to hear what they think. Do they think that family court decisions were in their best interests? Who better to ask? Of course family courts currently do no follow up studies whatsoever.
- 3 Aimed at the families of parents involved in a family law case. We want to hear what they think too. This will mostly be grandparents, siblings or new partners.

So what do we expect to gain from all these surveys?

Well, we see many possible benefits, but no real disadvantages (apart from our time, but then we're all volunteers anyway), in running them.

Firstly, of course, we will get statistical information from the survey results, allowing us to present information that no-one (as far as we know) has tried to collect before.

Secondly, it's very good advertising for us; both when we release the survey and when we make the results (or interim results) available. This will not only increase awareness of the EPA and our existence, but may encourage people to join us too.

Thirdly, we see it as a very good campaigning tool. For example, it may well send the willies up the legal industry when they realise we are collecting user satisfaction information on individual named Judges!

Added to all this, we are committed to making the results publicly available providing a useful source of information for other groups, and (we hope) maybe bringing all the Movement a bit closer together.

WANTED : CELEBRITY – young, attractive political party WLTM well known person with an interest in protecting children from damaging effects of family law. No campaign experience necessary, GSOH required to deal with government spin and family law. Any ideas of who we might approach? Please send suggestions to: enquiries@EqualParentingAlliance.com

Definitely *not* Equal Parenting Alliance Approach!

Homer J Simpson to Bart - "Son, if something seems hard when you first try it, then it's not worth doing".