**Esmee Fairbairn Foundation: Mindful Policy Group (MPG) first stage application for £485,000**

**BACKGROUND**

The group’s overarching goal is for national policies relating to children and families to incorporate understanding of attachment science.

Attachment theory was developed by the psychoanalyst John Bowlby out of a broad swathe of ideas including animal behavior, evolutionary biology and information processing. Ahead of his time (1907- 1990), he speculated about the then unobservable brain systems involved in this evolutionary genetic survival mechanism. Secure attachment develops through the mother's attunement and response to the baby's signals and the resulting confidence that she will be there whenever needed.

Inadequate childhood attachment burdens not only the individual but also society and its public services. Disturbed attachment produces adult physical as well as psychological ill health. It is a key factor in intergenerational parenting difficulties.

Attachment science now is a highly coherent interdisciplinary study of emotional and social development, describing and defining the relationships between children and their family members, which in turn predict how their future relationships will be carried on in the outside world.

The impact on society of attachment failure is immense: the Government has estimated that there are up to 500,000 ‘problem families’ where this is a major issue. The national cost is estimated at almost £50bn a year, equivalent to nearly half the total budget of the NHSS. .

MPG believes that the figure can be materially and rapidly reduced through different forms of intervention and management and the creation of laws and institutions that are based on the principles of sound attachment.

**MPG**

MPG is a team of like-minded professionals with high-level expertise across politics, psychology, communications, public administration, law, strategy and start-ups. Their profiles are [here](http://www.mindfulpolicygroup.com/about/who-we-are/). Prior to 2013 members had coordinated press campaigns, formulated policy, sat on government inquiries in key policy areas and secured representation on leading national organisations concerned with child welfare and infant mental health. In the summer of 2013, MPG was founded with the long-term aim of trading sustainably in order to support its charitable aims. We established a limited company to begin to develop commercial activities.

We set ourselves four goals for the first year and each has been achieved: publication of a book, organisation of a conference, establishment of a website that we plan to develop for the community of those involved in or touched by parental separation, and identifying where and how to apply ourselves in charity. We have now set up a charitable arm with HMRC charitable status and applied to the Charities Commission for this to be registered as a Charitable Company.

Publication in June this year of founder director Penelope Leach’s *Family Breakdown: Helping children hang on to both their parents* (the net proceeds of which are going to MPG) was the first major milestone. Drawing on the latest attachment knowledge, the book explains to parents and their advisers in the field of family law what they must do to minimise the impact of separation on children. It has introduced the concept of the need for ‘mutual parenting’ to meet children’s needs. The first two editions have already sold out: it is becoming the essential reference work in its field.

In September this year, MPG organised and hosted a conference for almost 200 of the leading family law professionals to hear new information from attachment science and discuss the need to reform the processes of family law to take better account of the needs of children. It was addressed by the world’s leading authority on attachment science, Dr Allan Schore, and was funded partly through CSR from the Daily Mirror.

MPG is following up this initiative by working with those who attended to facilitate the desirable changes. Tim Loughton MP, the last Children’s Minister and our chair, is proposing new legislation to outlaw deliberate alienation of children by one parent from the other.

We are also developing the MPG website; this stage is to provide interactive areas for parents.

**Next stages**

Our charitable arm now needs the resource to meet its objectives.

Sir Paul Coleridge, former senior High Court Family Division judge, wrote the foreword to Leach’s book and spoke at our conference. His remarks neatly summarise our reasons for applying to the Foundation. ‘Good policy will reduce the need for, not add to the cost of the remedies. We can make a difference with quite little money. It has to go on judicial training, an information programme before filing for divorce and on parent training at the onset of parenthood’. Tim Loughton’s comment to us is that this is a brilliantly powerful but simple combination in the ‘invest-to-save’ mode that government needs to espouse: too many of society’s problems are in truth too expensive to deal with, so we must reduce the size of the problems rather than relying on ineffectual marginal increases in the money made available to solve them.

In broad terms we would expect to allocate £485,000 as follows:

- £100,000 to research, produce and distribute education and information programmes for parents considering filing for divorce;

- £100,000 to research, produce and distribute judicial training materials;

- £150,000 to extend our website’s functionality and reach – success would look like Mumsnet for the family breakdown market with, alongside, a specialist section for the legal profession;

- £100,000 for two years and perhaps more of petrol in our tank – every effort has been voluntary to date and progress will be limited by resource;

- £10,000 to work on the promotion of *Family Breakdown* in the market and

- £25,000 to research and develop a most innovative approach to parent education proposed by Felicity de Zulueta, an MPG founder and the UK’s leading authority on childhood trauma – an attachment video game distributed online, through the NHS and WHSmith, joining the movement of serious gaming or ‘gaming with purpose’ that uses the most highly developed gaming techniques and technology for the purposes of education and training. We have in mind then to seek funding from the Wellcome Trust for the production of the game by Somethin’ Else, winner of the 2013 BAFTA award for Children’s Production Company of the Year with a Wellcome-funded game.

In summary, MPG aims to bring understanding of attachment into the political, public and individual consciousness. Our goals sum up as follows:

- reduce the cost to society of failures of attachment

- improve society and the lot of very many individuals in the process

- educate parents and professionals to minimise the harm done to the millions of children who are the casualties of family breakdown.

- improve family court practices and the knowledge and tools of all those involved, with better assessments, better understanding and the replacement of the adversarial system with one of co-operation and mediation.

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