

William Powell AM,
Committee Chair,
Petitions Committee,
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff.
CF 99 1NA

Dear Mr. Powell

Charter for Grandchildren Petition P-03-236

We are a support group helping grandparents who have been denied contact with their grandchildren, and in July 2009 we petitioned the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to create a **Charter for Grandchildren** and to make this charter mandatory for professional workers who are employed in the welfare of children.

The Charter for Grandchildren was the subject of a Short Debate in the Senedd, on the 23rd November 2011 lead by Janet Finch-Saunders AM and although the debate was supported by the Conservative Group it failed to inspire any enthusiasm from the other political parties with the one exception, that of the Deputy Minister for Social Services Gwenda Thomas AM who replied in response against the charter in the debate.

Nevertheless the Petition is still there and the need for the recognition and creation of such a charter is as great today as it was in 2009. If one looks at the figures of children in care from the Welsh Government's own web site we learn that in Wales, we had 4705 children in care in 2009 rising every year to 5725 this year 2012, an increase of 6% over last year. Clearly whatever programmes and strategies are being used it is just not working, and naturally it is the children and society in the long run that suffer. Our argument is that families are not used fully before the decision is taken to place the children in care.

We welcome the improvements in Family Law, and the establishment of a new Family Justice Network designed to bring about the best possible outcomes for children and families in Wales.

We acknowledge Families First which is designed to support families, particularly those living in poverty, with a programme of 5 key elements including a team around the family; a Joint Assessment Family Framework; the strategic commissioning of services; a commitment to shared learning and a disability focus, and we appreciate all that but wonder what the financial cost of setting all this up will be.

The **Charter for Grandchildren** is solely focussed on the needs of children and was suggested by us because of its simplicity and it consisted of:-

Protecting Children and Young People by them wanting to:-

Get to know us, Speak with us, Listen to us. Take us seriously, Involve us, Respect our privacy, Be responsible to us, Think about our lives as a whole, Think carefully about how you use the information about us, Put us in touch with the right people, Use your power to help, Make things happen when they should, Help us be safe,

We have had the Family Justice Review final report which on page 45 highlights The Child's Voice but the Petitions Committee had the petition for the Charter for Grandchildren years before the Family Justice Review Panel was set up.

We understand the Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure (Wales) 2011 came into force on May 2012 and that UNCRC has become part of domestic Welsh legislation and that it will help shape all future policy and that it will be necessary for all those who exercise the functions of Welsh ministers – including Cafcass Cymru officers – to show how they have given due regard to the Convention in making decisions affecting children.

It could be argued that from past experience we have little confidence in that type of initiative however we support the Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure (Wales) 2011, the UNCRC and hope to monitor its success.

Our thinking behind the charter was that, because of it being so simplistic putting children first that perhaps families and society would accept that in the event of parents separating the children's welfare would through time be automatically taken into consideration as normal responsible behaviour lessening the amount of custody court cases by making the child clearly the priority safeguarding the emotional abuse and trauma that children suffer at these heartbreaking times..

The Charter for Grandchildren would give grandparents a vital role in helping children maintain stability in their lives which to our thinking is absolutely essential for the wellbeing of children.

I would therefore be grateful if you could give these matters your consideration and confirm the Petition Committee's course of action.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank Bradfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Frank Bradfield

Grandparents Apart Wales.