

The rise and rise of parenting apps

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Back in the middle of the winter last year, I headed over to Melbourne to attend the Annual Conference of the Australian Chapter of the large international organisation AFCC (Association of Family and Conciliation Courts).

In advance of walking into the main conference hall for the opening plenary, I came across a desk of an organisation exhibiting there, "Our Family Wizard" – who, as it transpired, turned out to be a significant sponsor of the event. Even without that knowledge, I was impressed by the ease with which I could assimilate the information the representative was showing me.

I'd never really given much thought to how apps might be of benefit to separating and separated couples with children, but nor would I describe myself as a luddite either – I'm happy to confess to being a paid up member of all things Apple and other geek related activities.

So with my appetite whetted, and thinking about the work we do at the Family Works Resolution service in New Zealand (we are the largest NGO Supplier of FDR services in NZ), I made more enquiries.

A keynote which Our Family Wizard made, whetted my appetite further. Additional, more detailed enquiries were made with a number of colleagues in Australia, where the app is just starting to get a hold. I researched, read and listened to anecdotal feedback from overseas users, downloaded reports from stakeholders, and the American Family Court judiciary, and it clearly seemed appropriate to explore whether my organisation, the Family Works Resolution Service, could make use of this, in some form or another, within our own FDR service.

Over the course of a couple of months, discussions took place between the Minneapolis based firm and my organisation in Auckland.

We needed to ask ourselves so many questions. Would Kiwis be interested in using an app to communicate better with their ex? Would an app based on an American way of thinking be pertinent to our New Zealand population where such high levels of our service users, customers or clients, come from a Māori or Pacific Island background? How might Family Court and Family Justice colleagues respond to FDR clients, and court applicants and respondents, talking about this app and its use, or non-use?

Then there was the vexed question of how to manage the data the app collected. We're all aware of the current legitimate and justifiable concerns around the inappropriate storage and unexpected use of data – irrespective of whether or not tacit consent may have been given to such use at the time of downloading an app – I mean really how many of us read every page of terms and conditions on software before we click 'accept'?

So we worked through the questions, came up with a solution which seemed to fit the NZ market, negotiated with the vendor, and in January this year we became the first organisation, other than the American manufacturer, to bring the app to New Zealanders. In our FDR family mediation service, we offer a one year subscription to the app, free of charge, to all parties who successfully complete a FDR process. We see this as a win-win situation, encouraging parties with a relatively small incentive to get across the line, but far more importantly, we believe it's a real game changer for the way in which separating and separated mums, dads, and other guardians can communicate about the day to day care needs and plans for their children.

It's been less than a year since first we were enticed at the Exhibitors stand (so clearly having a stand at conference really works...) and yet we're now routinely offering up this subscription to parties who complete an FDR process.

We'll continue to monitor how well this supports our client base, but early signs show that people lap up the opportunity to communicate better with the other parent/guardian in day to day care and custody cases.

Here's a link to read more about ['Our Family Wizard'](#)>>

Timothy McMichael

Resolution Institute Accredited Mediator, Resolution Institute Coach and Assessor, the NZ Law Awards Mediator of the Year 2017, and the Family Works Resolution Service Manager, Auckland, New Zealand.