



Working to protect your legal rights

Annual Report

2014 - 2015

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Chair's Report

It is my pleasure, as Chair of the Law Centre's Management Committee to introduce this year's annual report.

Having said that, I have to start on a sad note. I would like to remember and pay tribute to Alderman Jim McManus and offer our condolences to his family. Jim had been involved in setting up the Law Centre and was a committee member for more than 20 years, only resigning in 2011, when he became Executive Member for Housing at Chesterfield Borough Council. Throughout his time, Jim worked tirelessly to support and promote the Law Centre and was still a firm supporter of the Law Centre after he left, always wanting to know how things were going if he met any staff or committee members. He will be sadly missed.

Having extended our services Derbyshire wide, we are very pleased to see Derbyshire Dales District Council value our work enough to core fund us for the first time. Further good news for later in 2015 is funding awarded by Amber Valley Borough Council to provide homelessness prevention work from our office in Ripley. This is a credit to the hard work of staff over the year that has continued to build our reputation, particularly around representing those at risk of losing their homes. Councils can see the financial benefits of preventing homelessness and recognise the value of the work that we can do. It also gives some satisfaction that



*Cllr Michael Gordon, Chair,
Derbyshire Law Centre's
Management Committee.*

our decision 2 years ago to change our name and promote our service more widely was the right one.

Funding from the Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund came to an end in June this year and we were rightly concerned as to how we would replace this vital income. I'm pleased to say that not only have we replaced it but we have been able to increase our level of funding slightly and the Law Centre remains on a sound financial footing.

This year has also seen our membership grow as an organisation with some 120 individuals and organisations now members. With hand on heart, I cannot say that there are great benefits to being a member, other than the show of support for our organisation and receiving regular updates. For us, however, it is hugely important as we have always endeavoured to maintain our community links and ensure grass roots participation and support. We therefore take great pride and appreciation from the show of support from people and organisations that feel it worthwhile to be a part of what we continually try to achieve: Access to Justice for the most disadvantaged in our communities.

I am delighted to say that, since the last Annual Report, the Derbyshire Law Centre has been nominated for 2 important awards. In November 2014, our Management Committee was awarded a Commendation by the Law Centres Network in the Rita Clarke Memorial Award for Excellence, in recognition of the tireless work of the Committee collectively, overseeing our change of name and moving premises, as well as the time and support

they commit to helping the Law Centre achieve its aims and remain successful. It was an honour to receive the award on behalf of the Committee.

Then in June 2015, Lisa Haythorne, our housing solicitor, was shortlisted as a finalist in the prestigious Legal Action Group Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year Awards, in the Social Welfare category. Sadly, Lisa just missed out on winning the award, but to be one of 3 lawyers nationally to be shortlisted was a tremendous achievement and recognition of the hard work she has put in both for clients and the Law Centre. We are all very proud of her.

This time last year we were worried about our Hate and Harassment project, which has been part of the work of the law centre under various funding streams for some years now. Big Lottery rejected a further bid and it was feared at risk. Fortunately, with funding from Derbyshire County Council and Derbyshire County Council Police and Crime Commissioner, that work has continued and the Law Centre has been a reporting centre for Hate Crime this year.

We were also funded this year by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to record and display a history of social housing in Derbyshire. This one year project has enabled us to engage with communities to hear their stories about council housing and society in a different time as well as providing an opportunity for us to promote the work that we do and publicise housing rights for people today. It has captured the interest of many local people and so look out for the exhibition as it tours libraries and other public meeting spaces in the County.

My thanks to Management Committee members for their sterling work this year, who amongst their other tasks were involved in overseeing a review of our constitution, review of pay and staff terms and conditions as well as our website development. My thanks also to the staff and volunteers who have worked so hard to make this year such a successful year for the Law Centre.

I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude on behalf of the Law Centre to our funders, Derbyshire County Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, North East Derbyshire District Council and Bolsover District Council for their continued support and provision of core funding that is the lifeblood of the Law Centre. My thanks also to Derbyshire Dales District Council and Amber Valley Borough Council who have provided welcome new financial support this year.

I hope that you find the annual report an informative read.

Councillor Michael Gordon

Chair, Derbyshire Law Centre's Management Committee.

Thank you to all the organisations that have given the Law Centre, an independent agency, financial assistance during the period 1.4.2014 – 31.3.2015.

Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council, North East Derbyshire District Council, Bolsover District Council, Legal Aid Agency, Big Lottery Fund (Advice Services Transition Fund), Business, Innovation and Skills via East Midlands Money Advice Partnership, Derbyshire Dales Citizens Advice Bureau and Comic Relief.



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



EMMA partnership
EAST MIDLANDS MONEY ADVICE PARTNERSHIP
advice online working together



An overview of the past 12 months

Over the past 12 months we have seen how the welfare and legal aid reforms have impacted on the lives of people in our area. We have seen many people who cannot get legal aid for family law, welfare benefits and employment.

Derbyshire Law Centre has been extremely fortunate to have the ongoing support from the County Council and a number of local councils that recognise the importance of free specialist legal advice. We would not be here today without their support.

It has been rewarding to work with Councils for the Voluntary Sector (CVS), voluntary sector organisations, credit unions and advice agencies to ensure that Derbyshire residents have enough food on the table and a roof over their heads. Councils, CVS's and many other agencies, including ourselves, have been working hard this year coming together to form partnerships to submit regional tenders to the European Union via D2N2 for Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Derby and Nottingham cities, to keep our services going and provide holistic support and advice to disadvantaged communities. As a result, we have been working with new consortia partners offering our services in a new way. This has



Tony McIlveen

been and still is an interesting journey that has made us look at what we can offer our partners within the voluntary, private and public sector.

We have seen the end of Big Lottery Fund's Advice Services Transition funding that funded two advice partnerships: Managing Demand 4 Advice and Improving Services Together. The Law Centre has been working in partnership with Chesterfield, Derbyshire Districts and North East Derbyshire Citizens Advice Bureaux in delivering employment advice across the county. As a result of this, we have seen an increase of demand for a free face to face and telephone employment advice service. Since the project started in 2013, the need for this service has mushroomed by 224.4% against targets.

We have also been working in partnership with Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre, NE Derbyshire CAB, Chesterfield CAB, Chesterfield and NE Derbyshire Credit Union and Age Concern (Chesterfield and District) on managing money better for the over 65s and have met our targets.

As reported last year we were concerned that Mortgage Rescue Scheme funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government was to be withdrawn in 2014. Fortunately, four local Councils: Bolsover DC, Chesterfield BC, North East Derbyshire DC and Amber Valley BC, have all provided us with financial assistance to continue the free legal advice, assistance and representation service to families with mortgage

and rent arrears who would otherwise face eviction. We have advised many families and individuals on low incomes who are struggling to make ends meet.

We have seen how the reduction in legal aid has restricted their ability to obtain free specialist advice to assist in managing their debts. However, core funding from four councils has enabled us to secure additional finance from regional sources. Money Advice Service via East Midlands Money Advice (EMMA), in particular, has enabled us to continue to provide free legal advice on debt matters to over 500 families across Derbyshire. We are pleased to report that we have received additional funding from MAS to employ a 0.5 FTE advice worker. This is timely as we have seen the demand for debt advice outstrip supply.

We are pleased to report that our Hate and Harassment advice and casework service received funding from the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner in 2015. This project, started in 2006, has been hugely successful and was in operation long before the Equality and Human Rights Commission began to investigate the harassment of disabled people in 2010. We hope to secure longer term funding for this project for the future.

The past 12 months has involved us in settling into our new premises at Rose Hill East, Chesterfield. We have found it to be hugely beneficial for both workers and callers/clients who are now able to access specialist advice on social welfare law under one roof. Between Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres and Derbyshire

Law Centre, we have made considerable savings on overheads.

This year has also seen us adopt the national logo developed by Law Centres Network. This will enable LCN and the Law Centres to have a UK-wide logo/brand that people will come to instantly recognise.

Since we have changed our name, we have been working hard to build support for the organisation by increasing individual and organisational membership. To date we are pleased to report that 25 parish and town councils have joined us and have the opportunity to be involved in the way we deliver our services across the county.

The challenge now is to maintain these vital services that we and our supporters have built up over the last 26 years. We look forward to continuing to protect the rights of those on low incomes through free specialist legal provision.

Tony McIlveen, Senior Solicitor
on behalf of Law Centre's staff

Debt

Through funding from the Money Advice Service, managed regionally by the East Midlands Money Advice project, we have helped over 500 individuals and families this year with their debt problems. We provide a free specialist service and help with all debt related problems. Our advice has ranged from providing emergency advice on bailiff visits, to negotiations with local councils about repayment of council tax arrears, to general financial management.

We have met the exacting targets required for the funding. Indeed, we have been fortunate enough to secure additional short term funding, initially for 6 months, to expand our service enabling us to trial a debt drop in service at the Law Centre some mornings. We hope that this additional funding will be continued from April 2016.



Pictured left to right: Lisa and Sue from the Debt Unit

Case study

Emily consulted us about a county court judgement she had discovered had been obtained against her by a mobile phone company. Emily could not understand what was going on, as she had never had a contract with that particular company, and had not received any letters about the debt, or paperwork from the court. We helped Emily make enquiries about this, and established that someone had fraudulently used her name to take out the original phone contract. We advised Emily on how to make an application to the court to cancel the judgement, and helped her make contact with the mobile phone company to make sure she was not liable for any costs, and her credit record was clear. We also advised Emily to report the matter to the police as a fraud. If Emily had not taken action to cancel the judgement, it would have stayed on her credit record for 6 years, and could have prevented her from getting loans or a mortgage in the future, even though the debt was not actually hers.

Case study

Jane works full time and lives in rented accommodation. Over the years, since her divorce, she ran up £25,000 in debt on various credit cards and loans. Jane struggled to keep up with the minimum payments on the cards and loans. Each month she ended up increasing her overdraft, and felt that her wages just went into a black hole, making her feel constantly under pressure. We went through Jane's finances with her and advised her on all options open to her for dealing with debt, such as bankruptcy, a debt relief order, or debt management. Because of the value of her car and her income, we advised Jane to opt for a debt management arrangement. We contacted all of her creditors and asked them to freeze charges and interest, and accept a lower offer of payment each month, which Jane could afford. The amount for Jane to pay each month in total was worked out after looking at her income and essential expenditure, and seeing what was left over each month (disposable income). All of Jane's creditors agreed to the arrangement, which meant Jane could now pay them off over a longer period of time at an affordable rate. Interest and charges are not building up, and she does not use the cards, or take out any more credit. Her creditors will review the arrangement every 6 months, but as long as Jane has kept to the repayment plan, there is unlikely to be any change. Jane now feels in control of her finances, and able to move forward.

Employment

We have felt the full impact of the effect of the removal of legal aid for employment advice this year as project funding that supported advice and casework at two CAB offices, as well as other outreach offices and even at the main office ended in June 2015, without other funding immediately being in place. We still have funding from Derbyshire County Council to provide specialist employment advice from Ilkeston and Ripley, and we are using core and other funding to support an advice service from our main office and a reduced service from Matlock and Buxton CABx and Bolsover Library as well as our daily telephone specialist advice service. Our charged for service also met its modest income target this year to help support the free service.

We have been trying to seek innovative funding and ways of ensuring clients get specialist advice. We have agreed a pilot project for 6 months with the trade union UNITE, whereby we can refer appropriate employees to them to join and if they do, UNITE will offer full advice and representation to them at grievance and disciplinary hearings and take the case forward, if it is felt that the employee has a case. We are moving forward in discussing this pilot with the Chesterfield and District Trades Union Council in the hope that other unions will join the pilot.

In terms of work this year, the demand is still there and if anything has increased. It is no surprise that we have seen a big increase in a number of issues connected to

Case study

A female client who worked within a large factory was sexually assaulted at work by a male colleague. The perpetrator was not dismissed and the matter was handled badly by the employers. We launched tribunal proceedings against the employer on the grounds of sex discrimination. Whilst the employers initially defended the claim, after a preliminary hearing at Employment Tribunal we were able to settle the matter by way of a significant award of compensation.

A number of clients have us approached after having problems with payment of wages and holidays from a local fast food chain. In each case, we have been able to recover all monies owed without having to issue tribunal proceedings

zero hours contracts and agency working. We have advised workers who have never been given wage slips or told that they are not entitled to paid holidays. We have had a few cases where care workers and cleaners are paid only for part of their day without being paid for travel time between jobs, meaning that they were paid below the minimum wage. We have seen cleaners, delivery drivers and labourers with contracts describing them as 'self-employed' in an effort to avoid holiday pay, notice periods and employer National Insurance



Pictured from left to right: Andrew, Ellen and Tony

contributions amongst other things. These employees and workers then find that they are not offered further work if they complain. In difficult economic times, pregnant women particularly come in for a hard time, as they suddenly find their capability to work being questioned or are faced with being forced to leave because they cannot work the same shifts or do the same work as before (care workers and agency workers particularly).

What is of particular concern to us is that we can see that people are still having serious problems at work but the numbers of those that then take their case to an employment tribunal has fallen dramatically in the last 3 years. This must be due in no small part to the introduction of fees in employment tribunals in the summer of 2012, followed by the removal of legal aid for employment problems the following year. The statistics are stark: A 67% drop in the number of tribunal claims since 2013. Unlawful Deduction from Wages claims have fallen by 64% and Sex Discrimination claims by a massive 87%.

What seems to be less well publicised is that those individuals on some state benefits, including ESA or on a low income may be entitled to an exemption from paying the fees, or at least a reduction, but the evidence suggests that individuals without access to advice and faced with fees, just give up at the outset.

Whilst the Ministry of Justice has promised to review the effect of fees in tribunals, no one expects there to be any change in policy and even now, the government is consulting on increasing tribunal fees in the near future. Sadly, there is a direction of travel that does not bode well for employees wishing to access justice to enforce their employment rights.

Housing

Continuing welfare reforms, a rise in benefits sanctions and the loss of legal aid for preventative work in housing have all taken their toll on Derbyshire residents, with the most vulnerable being hit the hardest.

However, despite the cuts, legal aid is still available in Housing for those in crisis and on the brink of losing their home. As a result, the Housing team continues to provide specialist advice and representation to a high volume of clients; the majority of whom are facing eviction as a result of rent arrears.

Further changes to the Tax Credits system, the rolling out Universal Credit and reducing benefit payments to once a month, will cause severe financial hardship for many local people. We have and will see many of them with rent, mortgage and council tax arrears. The recent budget has announced more changes to be introduced over the next year, including reducing the period of time backdated housing benefit can be claimed and turning mortgage interest payments into a loan, which will only exacerbate problems for families on low incomes. We predict a further rise in tenants and mortgagees ending up at court at risk of losing their homes.

Legal aid used to be available for tenants with rents arrears. Since 2013 legal aid is only available where a



Lisa Haythorne, housing solicitor. Finalist in the Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year Awards 2015

Notice to Quit has been served. This change has had a huge impact on families' financial capabilities, as well as causing financial and emotional distress that could have been avoided if legal aid were made available to encourage early intervention. It is partly in response to this that Councils have been keen to fund us to do early prevention work to avoid possession claims being issued if possible and this work is proving successful. Appointments in housing are offered across the County from offices in Chesterfield, Buxton, Ripley, Staveley and Bolsover where we can give specialist advice given on a range of problems faced by tenants, including possession proceedings, eviction and homelessness.

Alongside our legal aid services, we continue to provide advice and assistance to home owners facing repossession, either through direct contact from the client, identified at County Court, or through referral from the Local Authority. We are grateful to Chesterfield Borough, North East Derbyshire District and Bolsover District Councils who fund this work through their homelessness funds.



The Housing unit, pictured left to right: Andrew, Lisa, Sue and Steve

In addition, we have just signed off a service delivery agreement with Amber Valley Council to carry out homelessness preventative work in their area.

Case study

Mrs Copper is a secure tenant of the local council. She became estranged from her partner but continued to live with him in the same property. Her ex-partner sought alternative accommodation but this fell through and Housing Benefit was stopped.

Mrs Copper suffers from multiple ailments and is in receipt of the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance. She also has learning difficulties and struggled to deal with the rigours of challenging the loss of her Housing Benefit. She fell significantly into rent arrears but did not seek help from the Law Centre until two days before she was due to be evicted from her property.

We made an immediate successful application to the court to have the case adjourned for 28 days. This gave us the opportunity to work with Mrs Copper and get her finances back on track so that she could remain in the property. We assisted both the client and her partner in making fresh housing benefit claims individually and also encouraged her to have a water meter fitted to reduce to the amount of rent payable to the council each week (which includes a water rates element). We also persuaded the Local Authority to reduce the amount at which a Housing Benefit overpayment was recovered from £11 to £1 per week.

At the subsequent court hearing we were able to demonstrate that Mrs Copper had now got to grips with her

finances and was able to offer a sensible repayment schedule towards rent arrears. As a result of the Law Centre's intervention, the Judge granted a suspended possession order on terms, thereby allowing both Mrs Copper and her ex-partner to remain in the property.

Case study

Will owns his house, having bought it from the council under the right to buy scheme. He had to finish work 2 years ago and since then has not paid the mortgage. Due to severe depression, Will did not make a claim for sickness benefits that would have also entitled him to claim for help with paying his mortgage. The mortgage company issued court proceedings against Will, but he did not feel able to cope with them and did not attend court. A possession order was made against Will requiring him to leave in 28 days. He ignored that too and ended up with an eviction notice from the court. Will consulted us the day before the eviction was due to take place. We made an emergency application to the court to stop the eviction, which was dealt with by the court over the phone, as no judge was available in Chesterfield. Due to Will's severe depression we were able to persuade the court to postpone the eviction while we looked at a number of different options, including applying for ESA and help with his mortgage payments and applying for PIP. Eventually the mortgage company accepted an offer of payments towards the arrears so that Will could remain in his home.

Community Care

We have a small contract to carry out community care work in Derbyshire. There has been little take up so far which is surprising given the impact community care has on people with disabilities, whether a result of age or otherwise. The core of such work is advising on the availability of services and the duties of Social Services (Social Care now, in Derbyshire) to assess someone's needs and, if the needs are great enough, to provide services to meet those needs, or provide 'direct payments' which puts a budget into the applicant's control to pay directly for services.

These services are, might include, home help or visits from caring staff to help change, bathe, cook or shop. The law also provides for services such as accessing education or social facilities and the like, but it remains to be seen if that will actually happen in times of drastic budget cuts.

The new Care Act 2015 consolidates 60 years of legislation and on paper is a distinct improvement – it is an enlightened approach. It has ensured that councils have to consider a person's "wellbeing" and also provides for unpaid carers being able to request an assessment of their needs now as well. Sadly, every current service user is to be re-assessed under the new Act and at a time of service cuts, this can impact on those in need of care provision and we have been contacted by a number of clients who are worried about the risk of a reduction in the level of care needs assessed under new regime.

Case study

A client has M.E. a debilitating illness that means that any significant effort such as getting dressed or bathing – never mind shopping or cooking – causes exhaustion. She told us that she would have to sit down to recover after 10 minutes digging her garden and would have to rest for an hour from the effort of getting out of bed and washing and dressing. Her direct payment paid for someone to help her dress and wash so that she was not overwhelmed by those simple tasks. The proposed cuts to her Direct payment would remove half of her help and seriously affecting her quality of life. After she had sought advice from us, we contacted the Social Care Department and after some correspondence they agreed to keep her direct payments as they were.

Home for Good

The Law Centre has been awarded a grant by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund to investigate experiences of social housing in North Eastern Derbyshire, setting those experiences against the background of changes in legislation.



Prefabs on Kingsley Avenue, Chesterfield, 1957

'It were about '48 when I got my prefab...the first house I got...up Kingsley Avenue. Oh, it were lovely. I'd got a fridge...I thought I were in heaven. They even had a broom cupboard'.

The Home for Good project has been collecting contributions from local people in the form of oral history, photographs, documents or objects. We are recording the memories of a wide range of tenants and others across the three boroughs of Chesterfield, North-East Derbyshire and Bolsover.

The project has produced an exhibition that has been developing and growing all the time. A final exhibition will take place at the end of 2015 or early 2016 in the Chesterfield Museum. After that the material will be archived at the Derbyshire Records Office in Matlock and be made available for research purposes.

A number of volunteers have helped enormously on the project – a group of local historians in Newbold are conducting their own research into their area, and others are researching developments in social housing before 1919. Other contributions from volunteers include transcribing oral histories, indexing and photography. Volunteers are always welcome – contact us if you'd like to help collect or transcribe oral histories, join the research team, take photographs, help with indexing and archiving, help out at events, or if would like to contribute in any other way. All volunteers are provided with training and support.

Visit our website or contact Ellen Taylor, the project worker at the Law Centre if you would like to share your experiences, photographs, or other material, volunteer, or just find out about upcoming exhibitions.

Tackling Hate and Harassment

Throughout 2015, our work to tackle hate crime has been funded by the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner with additional support from Derbyshire County Council's Community Safety Fund. We held a launch event in February, attended by the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Alan Charles, as well as many partner agencies, statutory agencies and supporters within the voluntary and community sector.



Bernard Grunberg speaking at Holocaust Memorial Day 2015

The grants we receive enable us to provide three key activities at Derbyshire Law Centre:-

- A hate crime reporting centre
- A free specialist advice and casework service
- A free hate and harassment telephone advice and signposting service

All our services are currently available across Derbyshire, excluding Derby City.

Incident type	Numbers of incidents reported to police	Total Number of incidents
Racial	7	10
Religious	0	0
Homophobic	9	10
Transgender	1	1
Disability	9	12
Other*	7	10
TOTAL	33	43

**The category of 'other' includes neighbour disputes, ASB etc where no category for hate motivation could be identified but callers had used the term hate crime to describe what had happened.*

Reporting incidents to the Police

During the first six months of the project, we supported 33 people to report incidents to the Police. Whilst we have found that most people are either agreeable to reporting incidents to the police or have already done so when they approach us, not everyone wishes for this to happen. Racial, Homophobic and Disability related incidents were the most common.

Advise people on keeping safe & how to tackle hate crime

As part of the service to victims, we also provide advice and information and put people in touch with other more appropriate sources of support. So far, we have provided advice and information to 43 individuals in this way.

We also began providing a telephone call-back service in February 2015.

Call-backs can involve both hate crime reporting and advising of alternative actions that may be taken where no equality-related hate motivation can be identified or where advice about keeping safe is identified.

Examples of the broad range of issues include -

- Britain First leaflets being handed out outside a school - Reported to Police by caller and recorded by us for monitoring purposes.
- Car driven at disabled woman by neighbour who had previously made comments about her disability and sexual orientation – we reported this as a hate crime.
- Racial harassment at work – we reported this incident to the police as a racially motivated hate crime and the case was dealt with by the victim's Trade Union.



Holocaust Memorial Day event, Chesterfield 2015

- Harassment from a neighbour towards a family on disability benefits. The police provided mediation.
- Homophobic harassment and threatening behaviour from a neighbour, referred to and dealt with by our housing team.

Partnership working

In January 2015, we worked with Chesterfield College and Chesterfield Borough Council to deliver a very successful event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day 2015. The event was attended by over 150 people and we received excellent feedback.

As part of the Chesterfield Equality Forum we have been engaged with organising a series of community events with a 'tackling inequalities' theme such as world-views awareness, dementia friends and LGBT issues. All our events are attended by both members of the public and professionals representing local agencies and groups we also attend the Derbyshire Hate Crime Steering Group meetings and Hate Crimes Consultative Group meetings.

We have worked with the police to provide information to be included in a pack for victims, to be given out across the county following report of an incident. We are also raising awareness among other services who are likely to support victims in other ways about what we can do to help and how to access services.

Immigration

Derbyshire Law Centre no longer has a contract with the Legal Aid Agency to do Asylum and Immigration work and since April 2013, legal aid has not been available for immigration work anyway. We have done our best to continue a specialist telephone advice service to residents in Derbyshire over the past year. Often this is followed up with further advice by email or letter. We have used core funds to support this, but, sadly, we have not been able to fund a full casework service. Many enquiries to the Law Centre are from European migrants about work, settlement and benefits problems. We have also had a lot of enquiries from people wanting to bring their spouses to the UK, or renewing their spouse leave. The main problem continues to be that they must have a minimum income of £18,600 per year to qualify for leave to enter or remain, which continues to be a huge barrier for ordinary families.

We have continued to explore funding opportunities to expand our service again, but these opportunities are few and far between. We have explored the potential for charging for an immigration service, but need to ensure that such a service is affordable and properly resourced with accredited staff. Earlier in 2015, we took part in a consultation project concerning the rights of European migrants in the UK, and have been awarded funding, as part of a project led by the Law Centres Network to promote the rights of European migrants in the region.

Volunteers and Training

Derbyshire Law Centre continues to provide volunteering opportunities to people living in and around the local area. Due to supervision requirements we can only currently provide volunteering opportunities from our Chesterfield office. However, the co-ordination team continues to look at ways in which to expand the volunteering opportunities we provide. As in previous years we continue to focus on recruiting people who want to develop or update their work skills with a view to returning to employment. In a high number of cases volunteers see volunteering for us in a safe and friendly environment as a way to develop their confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing.

This year we recruited 4 new volunteers, 3 of which completed the 4 weeks classroom based training. The new volunteers joined and strengthened the existing assessment team of 6. Due to the flexibility of all volunteers, the Law Centre now has 2 to 4 trained volunteers per day conducting telephone assessments. All assessments are quality checked by a trained member of staff.

Of the enquiries we receive, 98% are contacted within 24 hours, with 88% contacted on the same day. 10% contact us after 2pm and are contacted the following day. The remaining 2% are clients who do not answer our return calls. In these situation all attempts are made to contact them the following day, which may include sending them a text or letter.



Members of the Volunteer Assessment Team in action.

We take this opportunity to say a big thank you to all the volunteers who have volunteered over the last year.

Volunteers (Past and present 2014-2015)

Katie France
Raman Hayre
Tim Mak
Elouise Taylor
Nadine Trythall

Isabel Wade
Debra Wesley
Sarah White
Jon Wynn

As a Law Centre we continue to seek funding to develop and expand the volunteering opportunities we provide. Derbyshire Law Centre continues to show its commitments to volunteers by continuing to internally fund the project.

Case study

Elouise is a young person who joined the assessment team in April 2015. In her interview she explained how years ago she had secured a university place but had to withdraw for personal reasons. This is something she has regretted for a number of years. Over the past few years Elouise has worked part time at a number of different jobs, often holding down two part time jobs to ensure sufficient income.

Since an early age she has always worked in the hospitality sector, talking to and dealing with people of all ages and of all nationalities. Elouise fitted into the team immediately and is growing in confidence and skills.

It is with great pleasure we can report that Elouise will now start a university course studying Law and Criminology in October 2015. Depending on her lectures she hopes to continue volunteering with us. All at the Law Centre congratulate her and wish her well in her future studies.



County Court Duty Scheme

Our specialist Housing and Debt team operates a duty scheme at Chesterfield County Court, up to twice a week. One of our specialist advisers is always available at court on these days to advise and represent clients and where possible negotiate with their landlord or mortgage provider. Anyone who is facing eviction from their home is entitled to free advice whether it is a first hearing or an application to suspend an eviction.

We have seen the effects of legal aid reform where more people have turned up at Chesterfield County Court and have been seen by us under the Court Duty scheme at a much later stage in proceedings.

Those facing repossession due to mortgage arrears, often have no representation because they are already in debt and cannot afford to pay for it. Legal aid is no longer available for mortgage arrear cases. The only free representation available now for mortgage repossession cases is under the Court Duty Scheme where we are always available to offer advice and representation on the day.

There is still limited legal aid for rent arrears cases but often clients do not realise what advice is available and only seek advice on the day of the hearing. It is these cases where our specialists can help with their wealth of experience on the day and can prevent an outright possession order being made and people losing their homes.

Our specialists can also deal with applications to suspend warrants even if an eviction is the same day. Their experience may assist someone in obtaining the correct benefits advice or even making an application to a charity to help reduce arrears.

We have represented 173 families in the period July 2014 to July 2015 under the Duty Scheme. We prevented homelessness in 86% of cases, overall, and prevented

eviction in 66% of mortgage cases. In those cases involving mortgage arrears where we took up the case and worked with local authorities, following the first meeting at court under the Duty Scheme we were successful in preventing homelessness for all families.



Chesterfield County Court

Comments and feedback

The Law Centre sends a questionnaire to all clients on completion of their case and use the information to identify problems, complaints and areas for improvement as well as how the client felt our intervention assisted them. Of those questionnaires returned, 98% felt they were listened to and understood, 1% were undecided and 1% said they were not listened to. Of the information we provide (written and oral), 98% said it was easy to understand, whilst 2% were undecided.

Complaints

In the past year we have received 2 expressions of dissatisfaction regarding the service we provided direct to the client. Both were investigated and responded to in accordance with our Compliments, Feedback and Complaints Procedure. Where a complaint identifies an issue with our service, steps are taken to remedy the situation.

Comments

- *You were very helpful; she knew her job. Thank you*
- *Excellent service to those in need. If LC didn't exist we'd have nowhere to turn*
- *We cannot thank Sue & Lisa enough. I don't know where we'd have been without you*
- *Sue Allard was fantastic in every way*
- *From despair when I first contacted you, to the amazing result. I can't thank you enough*
- *I am very grateful for TM's advice & efforts, saved me a lot of money*
- *I felt much easier with the situation knowing the LC was with me
Thank you*
- *I am so pleased you could help me and for free*
- *Thank you SA for all you did for me, a true professional*
- *Sincere thanks for all you've done for us, don't know where we would have been without help*
- *Advice and support letter a tonic- finally someone understood and took our side*
- *It's very good what you do for people that's in trouble and they haven't got no one to turn to*
- *What a fantastic help the Law Centre have been*
- *Would definitely recommend- hard working staff*
- *Stopped bailiff and council hassling me*
- *Excellent service, great staff who genuinely care*
- *SA was wonderful, Law centre amazing*
- *DLC is a life line, worth its weight in gold*
- *Just to say thanks for the help, would like to volunteer*
- *Staff extremely good and helpful, I felt more relaxed about my case*
- *Would recommend to all family and friends*
- *Just Thank You*

Who do we help?

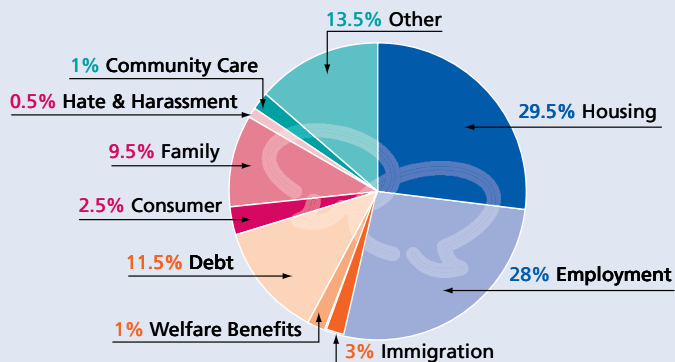
The Law Centre is open 35 hours a week. Most people's first contact is by telephone, although an increasing number of people contact us by email via our website as well as by text phone and in person.

How many people have we assisted during the year?

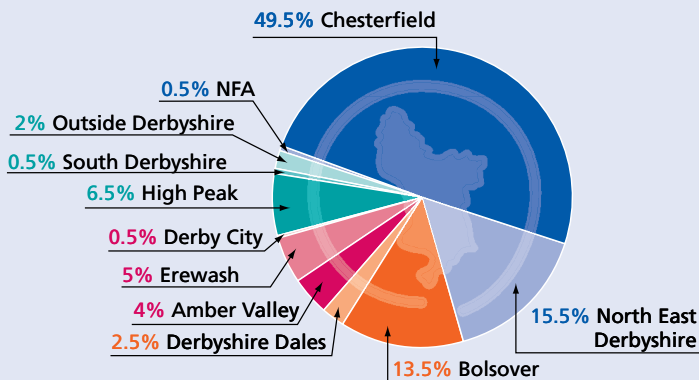
During 2014/15, we have:

- Welcomed and signposted 6542 people at the shared premises of which we:
- Advised 4302 callers
- Assisted 1071 clients on complex cases
- Received 544 referrals from other agencies.

Initial legal advice relates to:



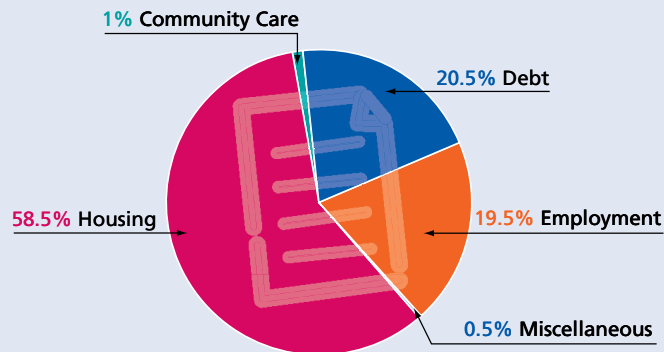
- Where do our enquiries come from?



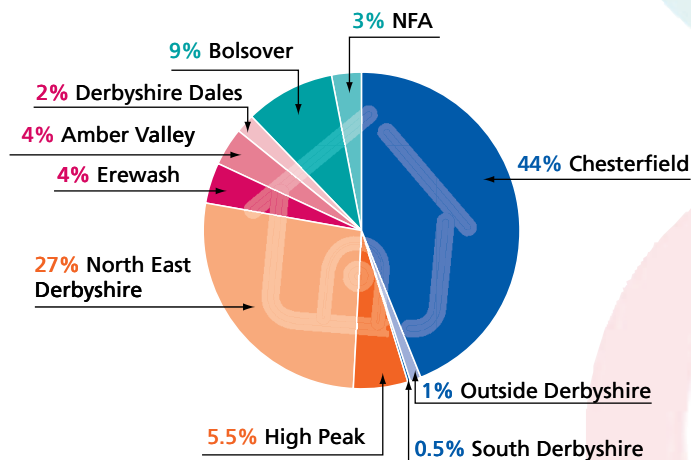
The Specialist Casework Service

1071 complex cases assisted on during this period

- Type of cases



- Where do our casework clients live?



- Profile of casework clients

47.7% for debt clients and 60.3% for housing clients identified themselves having a disability or long term health condition.

9.4% defined themselves as BME - Black or from another Ethnic Minority group.

61.9% of our clients are female.

- Age of our clients

13.4% are under 24 years of age

63.6% are between the ages of 25 and 50

23% are older people (Age UK's definition)

Outcomes achieved for clients

For our clients we have:

- Concluded 99% of all cases successfully
- Secured award/compensation for 37% of our employment clients.
- Prevented eviction for 88.3% of all clients that we have represented at our county court duty scheme.
- Prevented homelessness for 82% of tenants we have represented.
- Prevented eviction for 77.7% of the mortgagees at the county court duty scheme. 16.8% received an outright order where the Law Centre has undertaken after-court work and prevented them from being evicted.
- 94.5% of the families with mortgages who received representation and after-court work were not made homeless.
- Secured accommodation for 58 homeless clients with no fixed abode.

Financial Report

2014/15 allowed the Law Centre to build on its financial strategies started in 2013/14 following the loss of legal aid for employment and immigration, and a reduction of legal aid in debt by 96% and some in housing.

We had a productive and fulfilling year which left our year end accounts showing an overall surplus of £31,769 which allowed us to boost our reserves to provide security for our operating costs. The careful management of finances has allowed us to improve our reserves to at least cover the minimum operating amount and we will continue in this vein.

The move to the Town Hall has offered all kinds of benefits, financial being amongst the top benefits. The new rent agreement with like for like costings against pre move years has shown a saving of approximately 22%.

We were fortunate to attract new funding for our Hate and Harassment project through the DCC Community Safety funds and the Police and Crime Commissioner funds. A main aim for 2015/16 will be to continue to attract funding for this important project.

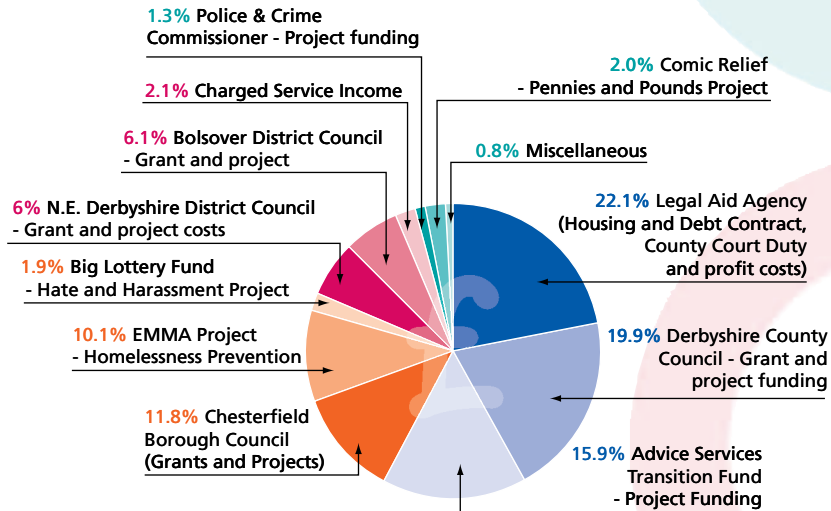
The Legal Aid Agency has continued to fund some of our housing work through the contracts awarded in April 2013. This work is supported through local authority

funding (both core grant and the Homelessness Fund) and with continued co-operative working, clients continue to receive additional housing support through our County Court work and Mortgage Repossession advice.

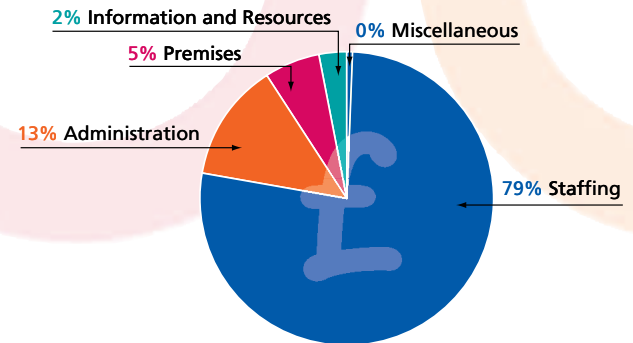
Demand continues to outstrip resources in employment. Funded in 2014/15 by a combination of core funds and Big Lottery ASTF project funds, the team has been working hard to secure new funding beyond June to replace the ASTF funding which ceases. We have subsequently attracted new funding from Derbyshire Dales District Council which will maintain an employment service in Ilkeston and Ripley.

As always, we are very grateful to all organisations that fund our services, both directly and indirectly. Special thanks to Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council, North East Derbyshire District Council and Bolsover District Council for their support through core grant funding. This is essential funding that allows the Law Centre to maintain high quality staff, providing an excellent service and, importantly, attract other funding. Our thanks also go to The Big Lottery, Heritage Lottery, Comic Relief, Money Advice Service and the Legal Aid Agency.

Income 2014/2015 by Funding



Expenditure 2014/2015



Management Committee Membership:

Representative

Cllr. Sharon Blank

Cllr. Stuart Ellis

Cllr. Chris Collard

Cllr. Jenny Flood

Cllr. Michael Gordon (Chair)

Cllr. Ann Syrett

Cllr. Mary Dooley

Alan Craw (Co Secretary)

John Duncan

David Eccles

Muhammad Farooq

Colin Hampton

Mary Honeyben (Vice Chair)

John Morehen

Cameron Philpot

David Shaw

Chloe Small

Marion Thorpe

Cllr. Elaine Tidd

Jumoke Tuwuru

Darren Webber (Treasurer)

Representing

Derbyshire County Council

Derbyshire County Council

Chesterfield Borough Council (until May 2015) Individual Member from then.

Chesterfield Borough Council

North East Derbyshire District Council

Bolsover District Council (until July 2015)

Bolsover District Council (from 23.7.15)

Chesterfield Liberal Democrats

Age Concern (Chesterfield and District)

Individual Member

Chesterfield Muslim Association

Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre

Derby and District Law Society

Staveley Seniors

Pensioners Action Committee

Chesterfield CAB

Individual Member

Individual Member

Staveley Town Council

ACCA

Individual Member



The Law Centre is a company limited by guarantee: 2453081

Registered Charity No: 702419

Solicitors Regulation Authority:
Practice No 71302

Auditors:
Barber Harrison & Platt, 57-59 Saltergate,
Chesterfield, S40 1UL

Bankers:
Lloyds TSB, 30 Rose Hill,
Chesterfield, S40 1LR

Organisational Members

50+ Inspired Group

African Caribbean Community
Association

Age Concern - Chesterfield & District

Age UK - Derby and Derbyshire

Ault Hucknall Parish Council

Asian Association of Chesterfield and
NE Derbyshire

Baha'i Faith Community

Bamford with Thornhill Parish Council

Belper Town Council

Bradwell Parish Council

Bretby Parish Council

Brimington Disabled Club

Brimington Parish Council

Burnaston Parish Council

Carr-Gomm Society

Chesterfield & NE Derbyshire Liberty
Group

Chesterfield Action for Access Group
(CAFA)

Chesterfield Constituency Labour Party

Chesterfield Liberal Democrats

Chesterfield Muslim Association

Chesterfield Tinnitus Support Group

Chesterfield Ability

Chesterfield and NE Derbyshire Cruise
Bereavement Care

Chesterfield and NE Derbyshire
Pensioners Action Group

Chesterfield CAB

Chesterfield Surestart

Chesterfield Town Centre Childrens
Centre

Chesterfield Volunteer Centre
Community Mental Health Team –
Chesterfield

Cross Counties Development Trust

Deaf and Hearing Support –
Chesterfield

Derby and District Law Society

Derbyshire Alcohol Advice Service

Derbyshire Coalition for Inclusive
Living

Derbyshire Districts CAB

Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group

Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre

Dronfield and District Access Group

Dronfield Baha'is

Eckington Parish Council

Elmton and Creswell Parish Council

Friends of Poolsbrook Country Park

Grassmoor, Hasland and Winsick
Parish Council

Hartington Upper Quarter Parish
Council

Heanor and Loscoe Town Council

Heath and Holmewood Parish Council

Health Properties Tenants Association

Hulland Ward Parish Council

LINKS: The Chesterfield and North
East Derbyshire Council for Voluntary
Services and Action Limited

Middleton Parish Council

Muslim Welfare Association

North Derbyshire Domestic Violence
Action Group

North Derbyshire Womens Aid

NE Derbyshire Labour Party

North Derbyshire Community Drug
Team

North Derbyshire Forum for Mental
Health Carers

Northern Counties Housing Association

Old Bolsover Town Council

Our Vision our Future

Overseal Parish Council

RELATE Chesterfield

Rural Action Derbyshire

Organisational Members cont.

SAIL

Shirland and Higham Parish Council

Sight Support Derbyshire

SPODA

Staveley Seniors Forum

Staveley Town Council

Stenson Fields Parish Council

Stonham Housing Association

Tibshelf Parish Council

Tontin Road Carers Support Group

TRUST

UNISON – CBC

UNISON – NEDDC

Unit 10

Unstone Parish Council

USDAW – Chesterfield

Whitwell Parish Council

Wingerworth Parish Council

Winster Parish Council

Wirksworth Parish Council

Individual Members

Keith Brown

Alan Crow

Chris Collard

Andrew Cross

David Eccles

Graham Fairs

Terry Gilby

Patricia Gilby

Mark Grayling

Mike Greenhalf

Linda James

Genet Morley

Kevin Morley

Dennis Mullings

Catherine Muyanda

Jackie Norris

Martin O’Kane

Cameron Philpott

Enid Robinson

Hazel Rotherham

Y Sorefan

Chloe Small

Reginald Tandy

Marion Thorpe

Margaret Vallins

Tom Vallins

Darren Webber

Alison Westray-Chapman

Staff List 2015

Sue Allard	Solicitor (Housing and Debt)
Wendy Bell	Administrator (Reception)
Sharon Challands	Coordinator (Office and Resources)
Fran Cole	Administrator (Finance)
Jane Crossland	Administrator (Caseworker Support)
Lisa Haythorne	Solicitor (Housing, Debt and Community Care)
Lorraine Mellors	Administrator (Caseworker Support)
Tony McIlveen	Senior Solicitor (Employment and Immigration)

Andrew Montgomery	Advice Worker (Housing and Employment)
Sarah Roy	Project Worker (Hate and Harassment)
Chris Spencer	Solicitor (Housing) – Joined June 2015 as Maternity Leave cover
Ellen Taylor	Advice Worker (Employment) and Project Worker (Home 4 Good)
Steve Taylor	Advice Worker (Housing, Debt and Community Care)
Nikki Tugby	Coordinator (Front Line Services)
Teresa Waldron	Coordinator (Partnerships, Projects, Social Policy and Debt Adviser)



Main office:

Derbyshire Law Centre,
1 Rose Hill East,
Chesterfield,
Derbyshire, S40 1NU



01246 550674 Text Box: 0845 833 4252



dlc@derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk



www.derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk



@DerbyshireLC

Branch offices *(Services offered at branches vary according to funding)*

Bolsover

Bolsover Library, Church Street, Bolsover,
Derbyshire, S44 6HB

Buxton

In the office of Derbyshire Districts Citizens Advice
Bureau, 26 Spring Gardens, Buxton, SK17 6DE

Chesterfield

In the offices of Banner Jones Solicitors,
2 Marsden Street, Chesterfield, S40 1JY

Ilkeston

In the office of Derbyshire Districts Citizens Advice
Bureau, Albion Leisure Centre, East Street,
Ilkeston, DE7 5JB

Ripley

In the office of Amber Valley CVS,
33 Market Place, Ripley, Derbyshire, DE5 3HA

Staveley

Staveley Library, Hall Lane, Staveley,
Chesterfield, S43 3TP