



# Cotgrave Advice Centre

Over 30 Years of Caring

## Annual Report 2018-2019

It is amazing to realise that we have been in All Saints' Church for two and a half years now. Our clients like the warm and welcoming atmosphere and admire its light and airy feel; they comment on how much they appreciate it as the historical centre of Cotgrave.

We have had a stable volunteer staff complement during the past year, only losing our employment specialist but keeping all our other experienced staff. We signed up for the Armed Forces Covenant, in support of our forces clients this year and hope to continue our joint work with the British Legion. Our solicitors are still extremely busy and are bringing newly qualified solicitors to work with us for experience. This is very much appreciated by our clients. We continue to ensure confidentiality by requesting that only advisers and clients visit during our sessions and we have confidentiality forms signed by all visiting experts.

Our welfare benefit expert has represented many of our clients at appeals and has still not lost a case. It is sad to see so many people routinely having their applications for benefits turned down and facing stressful periods while they don't know if they will receive any benefits. They often have to rely on friends, family and increasingly on food banks to manage while we fight for them through the appeals process. We are also now helping clients make applications for benefits under the new Universal Credit system. Some of the steps and requirements of this are very difficult for clients who do not have bank accounts, email addresses or a fixed home address. We are able to provide useful assistance to the growing number of people who seek our help with benefits and debt. Hopefully in the long term the system will settle down to fulfill the aspirations of Government for a simpler universal benefit system.

The Rushcliffe Advice Network continues to meet twice a year and provides support for management which is much appreciated. The Cotgrave Advice Centre web site is continually updated by our IT Expert and is still being viewed about 100 times a month. We continue to get a lot of new clients through this source and it also answers many queries without having to contact us further. We have received a County Council funding grant but it was only half of what we requested so our funding levels are now reducing even though we are still supported by a local charity. The photocopier is soon to have to have major new consumable items fitted which will prove expensive so we have had to put up our costs marginally to cover this.

All our staff enjoy their work and appreciate that the people they help often have no-one else to help them. We ensure our staff are supported in their work and have annual meetings to make sure all their volunteering expectations are being met and they are happy in their roles, most of the time extra chocolate biscuits cover this! The efforts of the volunteers and the centre's management committee continue to make certain that Cotgrave is a brilliant place to live with support for everyone when they need it.

Jacky Shaw Manager April 2019