

Talk for 40th Anniversary 11 August 2024

Good morning everyone, it is great to see so many people here today to celebrate as we reach this momentous time in the Advice Centre's life. As well as past and present members of staff we have with us Lord and Lady Coaker, Vernon and Jacky who I have known since the advice centre started and they were parish councillors and always supporters, the Chairman of the Nottinghamshire County Council Richard Butler, the Mayor of Rushcliffe Andy Brown and his consort Sylvia, the Chairman of Cotgrave Town Council my husband Ian Shaw and the Chairman of our local RBL branch Sam Mitchell who with his wife Caroline, who is in the choir, moved into our first house in Cotgrave and are still there. Welcome to you all.

As most of you know I am Jacky Shaw the Manager of the Advice Centre. Having led a nomadic life with the armed forces I arrived in Cotgrave 42 years ago to be welcomed by the Church and, for the first time in my life, I felt truly at home. When in April 1984 the then Rector Rev Bryan Barrodale asked for volunteers to set up an Advice Centre, and if you knew Bryan he was not someone you could refuse, so I didn't take much persuasion to give something back to the community that had given me such a welcome. The original idea of Rev Barrodale was to give constructive help in response to the Miners Strike which had impacted greatly on the residents of Cotgrave and to support their families.

A team of advisers and coffee makers was set up and some of you are here today, we were trained and opened in the Church Hall, which is now owned by the Nursing Home next door. The first few months were a steep learning curve for us all as we provided information and support for residents in Cotgrave and the surrounding Rushcliffe area, as well as giving coffee and biscuits to people who called in giving everyone the confidence to speak openly to us about their problems.

After 18 months I left to return to full time work vowing I would return when I was able. During this time the advice centre moved to the Leisure Centre and then on to the Futures building where I rejoined 20 years ago. We then moved to the Methodist Hall where we saw our clientele increase month on month. One day Rebecca called in to ask if we would like a Solicitor to supplement our staff and offered her services for one day a month pro bono. I of course jumped at the chance and Rebecca, together with Vicki are still doing amazing work with our clients.

When the Methodists redeveloped their hall we were able to move back to All Saints' Church which had also built a new extension housing a kitchen and toilets so we could now operate from here where we still continue with our Tuesday and Thursday morning sessions. We are now well known throughout our area with clients returning together with referrals of their friends and family, many of whom are now our friends and I am greeted by clients as I walk around Cotgrave as they update me on their lives.

Over the years we have become expert in form filling, mainly welfare benefits and blue badge applications, together with consumer problems and employment and our Solicitors deal with all legal matters. We will also help with anything else we are asked to address. We do not refuse to help anyone and will either deal with a problem presented to us or know where to refer the client for more expert support. We have a superb website that is kept up to date and gives the answers to many queries people have without having to visit us. During the pandemic we kept going via our email and mobile phone and then started an appointment system with screens, masks etc. We now operate a walk-in service alongside the appointment system and see our numbers going up all the time.

In order to keep our services available to everyone, free of charge, we need to be financed by grants from local councils and charities. Unfortunately we have suffered from the financial downturn nationally and are looking to find new sources of charitable grants alongside Rushcliffe Borough and Nottinghamshire County Council grants. This year we obtained a Levelling Up Grant and were generously supported by ASDA but we still need a regular method of income to pay our running costs. During the next hymn we will be taking a collection for the Advice Centre and ask for your generosity. The church collection is in a bowl by the door and there is also a credit card machine there too.

We are always looking to recruit new volunteers to be trained up as advisors and doing supportive office work with clients files and keeping our paper work up to date and in particular applying for grants. I am delighted to

report that following our recent article in the Cotgrave Connections magazine we have had two new volunteers apply to join us, but we always need more.

After several moves during our 40 year history we feel we have found our settled home here in All Saints' Church and have been made so welcome by the Rector and the Church Council. I hope that we will be able to continue with our work here which has increased from a trickle in the early days to nearly 40 clients each month.

Now I am really looking forward to talking to everyone after the service and invite you all to partake in the refreshments, prosecco, orange juice, coffee, cake and nibbles in the north aisle, courtesy of Nottinghamshire County Council. Once again, thank you for all your support for the Advice Centre we really appreciate all that everyone does for us and hope you continue to support us well into the future.

Jacky Shaw Manager