

## contactLINK case study Chesterfield Law Centre

### A Win-Win Solution!

#### Who they are

Chesterfield Law Centre offers free, confidential legal help, advice and representation to individuals and groups in the Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire districts via their team of specialist advice workers and solicitors.

They also provide signposting to other agencies and advice, self help information fact sheets and helpline information.

Volunteers run the reception, for phone and drop-in enquiries. This provides work experience, which in turn helps volunteers move on into paid work or further learning opportunities.

#### Why did they feel they needed a database?

Previously most information was held individually by case workers, and given out to clients on an individual basis. There was no central pool of information and so no standardised approach to information provision.

So, generally, whatever the query, the volunteers would pass clients directly onto the specialist case workers, and any general information given out was dependent upon which worker they got.

A shift of funding towards the provision of specialist advice provided the final push that things had to change.

It was decided that a centralised database could provide basic generalised information, so that the volunteers, with training, could offer clients a first level of response, with generalist advice and a signposting service, leaving the specialised case workers to work with those clients that needed their expertise.

#### So what happened?

Anne Frazer, the administrator, was given the role to research what was needed and available. She began the process of specifying their needs. It rapidly became quite complex.

She attended a “specifying a database” training, provided by the local High Peak CVS, and, from a list of various databases available, identified one, contactLINK, that seemed to match what they needed. She downloaded a demo version to trial.

Anne spent over 6 months making sure it covered everything, regularly contacting the supplier, ITsorted, with questions, and finding many more things that they’d need. “I realised I didn’t know exactly what we wanted until I really started to experiment with it.”

Finally contactLINK was implemented. Names and basic contact details were imported from Word documents, and training was provided to key staff – including discussions on how best to set up and use the features for their organisation and processes, as well as a plan for rolling it out over the whole organisation.

Over the following weeks staff trained the volunteers in the use of the system.

## What difference has it made?

Having a centralised database with information about other organisations and sources of advice, information etc now means that:

- volunteers now provide initial level support and signposting to clients –in turn providing them with valuable work experience and helping them get a better position in the job market
- case workers spend more time providing advice in their specialist areas – which means the Law Centre achieves more of the work it's funded to do
- staff generally have more time
- more clients can be seen and served, faster and more efficiently – which in turn benefits the wider community
- there is a more standardised approach to information that is provided
- all staff now share their contact information, making it easier to access, more efficient, and giving the Law Centre a wide base to pull from for any publicity mailings

## What worked well?

- “The support ITsorted provides for contactLINK is great.”
- “Installation was easy.”
- “The system itself works well.”
- “Having data transferred was a great help. It was stored in various places and having it moved into the database meant that data cleansing was easy, being able to see duplicates and merge them easily.”

## What didn't work well?

- “It took us much longer than expected to enter the remaining data from paper sources.”
- “The implementation of the database ended up too close to our deadline so everything was done in a rush.”

## What could other organisations learn from their experiences?

- “Allow twice the amount of time you think its going to take.”
- “Have a strategy to get people on board and engaged with the system and to stay engaged with it.”
- “Work out ways of encouraging staff to use the database and store information they collect on it.” In the words of one of the managers, “if you don't use it, you'll lose it!”.
- “Training is essential – both initially and regular refreshers, to keep skills up-to-date as well as simply encouraging the effective use of the database.”

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contactLINK is being used in a variety of organisations including infrastructure or 2<sup>nd</sup> tier organisations and front line organisations.

To see whether your organisation might benefit from a database generally, and contactLINK specifically, give us a call and/or have a look on our web site [www.ITsorted.org.uk](http://www.ITsorted.org.uk)

In particular, download our FREE 'choosing a database' pack, try out our on-line demos, download a fully working version to try out at your leisure or ask us for a face-to-face demonstration of what contactLINK can do.