

## Whole System Initiatives

### Family Case Study – Newcastle Regional Office

The Newcastle Customer Support Manager, Chris Purvis, has worked to build relationships with influential family courts in the North East region over the last three years. This was due to the regional office receiving frequent summons to attend court to explain LSC decisions on applications for funding.

There was poor communication of the LSC decision-making policy to the courts, which resulted in:

- An adversarial relationship between the Judiciary and LSC
- Providers misinforming the courts in relation to funding decisions/reasons for delay
- Summons to appear before the judiciary to explain decisions resulting in the loss of valuable experienced caseworker resources
- Delay in progressing proceedings through the courts, sometimes for many months, causing unnecessary additional expense to the fund
- Delay and inconvenience instructing experts
- Distress caused to clients and children through delay in proceedings

A variety of initiatives were then implemented to address these issues:

- Provision of a direct line for enquiries by the Judiciary
- Arranged shadowing of the Judiciary to gain an understanding of how the Courts work in practice
- Visited local Court Managers to seek feedback and identify issues causing problems for the Courts and other court users
- Identification of, and securing places on, influential Court User Groups within the region
- Identified influential members of the Judiciary and forged relationships with them
- Communication of changes in policy that impact on court practices
- Attending Court open days to promote the CLS

Benefits to the LSC regional office, courts, service providers and clients have been significant. These have included:

- As a result of improved communication, no summons to appear before the judiciary have been received by the regional office since December 2005, when previously there had been approximately 5-6 per year
- The Judiciary are now also more pro-active, contacting Chris Purvis when issues arise if it cannot wait until the next meeting.
- First time processing of applications, particularly authorities, as courts are aware of funding policy guidelines and make orders accordingly.
- An improved relationship with the courts resulting in becoming a member of the Public Law Outline Pilot Project Board.
- Attending court open days to promote Community Legal Advice to both court staff and the public
- A greater awareness of Community Legal Advice with members of the public who approach the courts for advice by:  
Frontline staff providing customers with CLA details  
Newcastle and Northumberland courts now provide a telephone at the front desk for clients to call CLA  
CLA leaflets are to go out to respondents with all notices of issues of proceedings (for those matters for which legal aid is available)