

A summary of the Joining Up The Dots project, a partnership funded by the Big Lottery's Advice Services Transition Fund.

In 2013 Citizens Advice East Herts was allocated funds from the Cabinet Office and the Big Lottery Fund through their Advice Services Transition Fund. This two-year funding is to be used to help the not-for-profit sector transform and adapt to a new funding environment by:

- renewing its service models to reduce duplication;
- measuring the difference services can make to people's lives; and
- bringing providers together to be more efficient and effective

The project was launched in October 2013 with six formal partners including:

- Circle Housing South Anglia
- Citizens Advice East Herts (*lead*)
- East Herts District Council
- Herts Aid
- Mind in Mid Herts
- Next Step

Over the life of the project over 100 organisations were involved.

On 30th September 2015 the project will officially end.

As the project is coming to an end we would like to thank all the individuals and organisations who took part. A lot has been achieved in two years and strong partnerships have flourished between organisations in the voluntary sector in East Herts as well as Hertfordshire. Here are some key facts about the project:



Online access

The Joining Up the Dots project helped increase access to information and advice by equipping partner organisations with mobile devices and Wifi connections. The following organisations received equipment funded by the Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund:

- Bishop's Stortford Foodbank
- Citizens Advice East Herts
- CVS East Herts and Broxbourne

- East Herts YMCA
- Ferndale Sheltered Housing (part of the Circle group)
- Hertford Foodbank
- Herts Aid
- Herts Mind Network in Ware and Bishop's Stortford
- The Learners Community Library
- Next Step (part of Hertford Regional College)
- Windhill Children Centres

Monitoring of the mobile devices' use over the project life time has shown that in 95% of cases, service users, volunteers and staff were able to find the information they needed to resolve their issue without having recourse to face-to face advice. This figure includes service users who found the information they needed through information assistance (i.e: clients being assisted with their online search by a member of staff or a volunteer).



Project partners have explored co-location as a way of improving access to information in a rural district. During the life of the project the following services have piloted co-location:

- Citizens Advice East Herts / East Herts Libraries: Monthly information sessions in Bishop's Stortford and Hertford facilitated by Citizens Advice East Herts
- The Volunteer Centre East Herts and Broxbourne / Citizens Advice East Herts: Monthly advice sessions in Hertford on volunteering, CV writing, work experience.
- Citizens Advice East Herts / Mind in Mid Herts (Hertford): Weekly advice sessions offered by a specialist mental health adviser to people with mental health problems.
- Circle Housing South Anglia / Citizens Advice East Herts: Weekly advice sessions offered to Circle residents in rural areas. The advice service was located on Circle's mobile office, travelling to villages in the district.
- Herts Mind Network / Citizens Advice East Herts: Co-location of services in Manor House, Buntingford.

- Buntingford and Puckeridge medical practice / Citizens Advice East Herts: bi-monthly advice sessions offered at the GP surgery in Puckeridge and facilitated by Citizens Advice East Herts.

Over the life of the project, 52 clients with mental health problems were surveyed about the benefits of co-location of advice and therapeutic services. All respondents (39) stated they preferred accessing services from one location.



The Joining Up the Dots project helped to develop the skills and knowledge of the voluntary and statutory sector in East Hertfordshire by offering a 3-day training programme on outcomes and impact measurement. This programme was facilitated by the Charity Evaluation Services (part of NCVO). The programme was delivered in November 2014 and April 2015 and was attended by:

- CVS East Herts and Broxbourne
- Citizens Advice East Herts
- East Herts District Council
- East Herts Libraries
- East Herts YMCA
- Herts Aid
- Home Start East Herts and Broxbourne
- Mind in Mid Herts
- Next Step
- The Volunteer Centre East Herts and Broxbourne
- Windhill Children Centres.

In June 2015, over 40 organisations attended our end of project event held at the Nigel Copping Community Building in Stanstead Abbots. At the event, project partners were able to share how their organisations had benefitted from this training programme. We are especially grateful to East Herts YMCA and Herts Aid for their input in the day as well as CVS East Herts and Broxbourne who co-hosted the event alongside Citizens Advice East Herts.



The Joining up the Dots project set up a new referral system between advice and support agencies, ensuring vulnerable people in the district are able to access the support they need rapidly and efficiently, preventing difficult situations reaching crisis point. The agencies involved in the referral system are:

- Citizens Advice East Herts
- Herts Mind Network
- Mind in Mid Herts
- The Money Advice Unit , mental health project (Oxford House)
- Adult Community Services – Oxford House, Bishop’s Stortford
- Community Mental Health Services – Hertford County Hospital

Feedback taken from a sample of service users (32) showed that:

- 72% of respondents felt that advice made a lot of difference to their wellbeing
- 55% of respondents felt that advice made a lot of difference to their health
- 73% of respondents felt that advice made a lot or some difference to their ability to help themselves
- 49% of respondents felt that advice made a lot or some difference to their confidence level

Over the past two years, the Joining Up the Dots project has enabled the partnership to increase the skills of its workforce and to pilot new ways of working in order to tackle more efficiently the inequalities faced by some vulnerable groups in East Herts. The Joining Up the Dots project has come to an end but a legacy remains of collaboration and joined-up working which will continue to have a positive effect.

If you would like further information about the Joining Up the Dots project, please contact:

Laura Hyde,
Chief Executive, Citizens Advice East Herts
admin@ehcas.org.uk