

## News release

### Solicitors celebrate a collaborative approach to the law

Local solicitors are celebrating, two years on from the formation of a Collaborative Pod, set up to offer Collaborative Law to families in Gloucestershire.

Collaborative Law is a pioneering service which was introduced as a way for divorcing or separating couples to resolve their issues without going to court. It is a way for couples to work together as a team and with trained professionals to deal with family and child disputes respectively.

Since the Pod was launched, the number of specially trained solicitors offering Collaborative Family Law has risen from eight to 16 across 12 solicitors' firms. There are also collaborative coaches, mediators and three financial advisers in the Pod.

The process involves each couple instructing a trained collaborative lawyer in discussions to resolve their dispute. This takes place over a series of four-way 'face to face' meetings involving the two lawyers with their clients. All four participants sign up to an agreement which commits them to try to resolve the dispute without going to court. If the process breaks down, the lawyers are disqualified from then acting for the couple in the court process.

Other professionals who can be brought into the four-way discussions include financial neutrals and collaborative coaches. Any professional involved in the collaborative process must be accredited by Resolution (formerly the Solicitors Family Law Association) so that consistently high standards can be maintained.

Collaborative Law began as a concept in America. Hollywood actor Robin Williams was engaged in the process in his divorce and there has been little or no publicity about this. Its supporters point out that this is in contrast to the McCartney/Mills divorce which proceeded under the traditional 'court lead' process. It was acrimonious and attracted huge publicity.

John Sherahilo, liaison officer for the Gloucestershire Collaborative Pod, who is Head of the Family Department with Thomson and Bancks said: "Collaborative Family Law has been a great success locally. There is growing interest in the process. It promotes respect, keeps clients in control of the process and addresses each couple's unique concerns.

"The Pod has been strengthened by other professionals joining it and we are confident we can offer a well rounded service to couples who want to separate or divorce in a reasonable manner.

“The interests of children are very much at the forefront of the process but it also enhances communication between couples and lays the foundation for a healthier relationship after the divorce or separation.

“Another good reason for using the collaborative process is that it is private. The family courts are to be opened to the press, albeit to those who have been suitably accredited, but if clients don’t want their dirty laundry potentially aired in public, they know which process will suit them best”.

Couples who have used the service say it was a Godsend. One said: “Collaborative is the way forward for divorce. It made a painful process as respectful and mindful of all concerned as possible”.

Another grateful couple said: "We weren't sure where we were in our marriage and didn't want to be rushed. The advice we were given by our solicitors gave us choices and the time to make sure we were doing what we wanted to do. That made the decision to divorce hard but less hurtful".

A third couple were keen not to let divorce affect their friendships and careers. They said: "We wanted a good divorce. We have mutual friends who we wanted to keep in touch with and we both worked in the same industry. We knew our social and career paths would meet sometime and we didn't want our past to get in the way of our future. The collaborative process allowed us to achieve this".

"My wife and I worked together with the help of our Collaborative Solicitors to discuss our worries and explain what we were each trying to achieve. This led to an agreement that suited our family circumstances. It was hard with all the emotions going on but I think we got the best agreement for our family and that it will work because we did it together. I don't know if we could have done this by any other means".

Solicitors firms involved in the Collaborative Family Law Pod:-

Thomson & Bancks, Tewkesbury and Pershore  
Rickerbys, Cheltenham  
Willans, Cheltenham  
Hughes Paddison, Cheltenham  
Davis Gregory, Cheltenham  
Knights, Cheltenham and Newcastle-under-Lyme  
AES Winterbothams, Stroud  
Alison Fielden, Cirencester  
Stone King Sewell, Cirencester  
Davey Franklin & Jones, Cirencester and Gloucester  
Lass, Salt Gavin, London and Cirencester  
Ambrose Appelbe, London and Tetbury

The Gloucestershire Pod will celebrate its second year in business at a party held at Rickerbys in Cheltenham on 9<sup>th</sup> April.