

## What's new?



The latest issue of UNISON Welfare News has just been published and is packed with tips, case stories and information for members to help them through difficult times.

Our new two poster set can be ordered through the online catalogue

quoting the relevant stock numbers.

- A4 UNISON Welfare services poster (with space for branch welfare officer contact details) stock no. 2563
- A4 UNISON Welfare debt service poster stock no. 2731

We have updated our Powerpoint presentation based on our new booklet aimed at members. You can still use our old Powerpoint aimed at activists as it contains useful messages on recruitment but you may need to change some of the details.

We have created a new volunteer zone on the welfare pages on the UNISON website. We hope this will give us a greater capacity to make information aimed at welfare officers available on the website and means members don't have to plough through material that is not relevant to them [www.unison.org.uk/welfare/volunteer\\_zone.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/welfare/volunteer_zone.asp)

Have you thought of advertising UNISON Welfare in your branch or employers publications such as the staff newsletter?

We have a series of advertisements promoting UNISON Welfare, the debt advice service and Octopus – the new lottery in aid of UNISON Welfare. These will be posted to the web pages or you can obtain the artwork from [welfare@unison.org.uk](mailto:welfare@unison.org.uk)

## Service activity



Applications to the charity have continued to rise with a 17% increase in the second and third quarters of 2008. During this period we received over 1,100 applications. Reflecting the impact of rising prices and the credit crunch, 28% of grants related to priority debts. There has also been a significant increase in priority 1 cases. Many of these are quite complex and time consuming involving repossession or eviction and a lot of liaison with external agencies.

### CHECKLIST

- We are still receiving a lot of applications on old forms, some over ten years old! This does cause delay when dealing with cases. Can you help us to ensure branches in your region are only using the current application forms?

Over a third of cases were initially assessed within ten days and 75% of applications were assessed, partially completed or fully completed within 15 days.

### ITEMS FOR YOUR AGENDA IN THIS BRIEFING:



- New materials
- Service activity
- Save Xmas
- Tax credits
- Energy best deal
- Financial capability forums
- And more...

# Credit crunch – national initiatives

As part of our response to the credit crunch we have teamed up with a number of organisations to help members take steps to protect themselves and to provide branches with additional tools to support them.

## Save Xmas

We are working with Citizens Advice to promote the Save Xmas toolkit which was developed by the Office of Fair Trading in response to the collapse of Farepak. The toolkit is a great resource for you to use with stewards and members to inform them about the alternatives to the Christmas hamper schemes when saving for Christmas or other expensive items such as holidays or furniture. You can access the toolkit via the OFT website at [www.of.gov.uk](http://www.of.gov.uk)

We can also offer a little external funding towards a limited number of Save Xmas presentations between now and March 2009 (except Scotland)\*. All you have to do is guarantee an audience of employees or a mixed audience of activists and members at your event or workplace and if possible someone who is facility trained to deliver the presentation. Citizens Advice also prefer it if facilitators can attend a training for trainers event. Please contact UNISON Welfare on 020 7551 1620 or e-mail [welfare@unison.co.uk](mailto:welfare@unison.co.uk) if you are interested.

## Energy Best Deal



We are also liaising with Citizens Advice to publicise the Energy Best Deal initiative which they have developed with Ofwat and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory reform. Like Save Xmas, the campaign is being rolled out across the UK (except in Scotland) with locally delivered presentations and offers simple advice for consumers on how to cut energy bills. See the latest issue of UNISON Welfare News (Issue 23) for some of the energy saving tips. New consumer champion Consumer Focus also has information on the best energy deals [www.consumerfocus.org.uk](http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk)

## Tax credits

We have teamed up with work-life balance charity, Working Families, to provide branches with information so they can help members to claim tax credits and to signpost them to sources of advice and information.

November's In-Focus magazine for UNISON stewards publicised the new tax credits guide for branches and this can also be found on the welfare pages [www.unison.org.uk/welfare](http://www.unison.org.uk/welfare). Working Families can also

undertake a limited number of workplace visits. They are especially interested in hard to reach audiences such as contracted out employees and migrant workers. You can contact Working Families to arrange a tax credits outreach session at your workplace, or request posters or leaflets to display on tax credits by telephoning Lei Lau on 0207 253 7243 or email [lei.lau@workingfamilies.org.uk](mailto:lei.lau@workingfamilies.org.uk). Working Families free helpline (0800 013 0313) provides advice on tax credits.

## Financial capability forums



Citizens Advice are rolling out Save Xmas and Energy Best Deal presentations through regionally based financial capability forums. These are local networks of agencies and organisations involved in money advice and financial capability work usually based around a citizens advice bureau. By getting in touch with your nearest forum you will find out about presentations in your area and become part of a local network to share resources and knowledge. We will be posting contact details for forums on our web pages. Alternatively you can request a copy at [welfare@unison.co.uk](mailto:welfare@unison.co.uk) and we will e-mail one to you.

\* The Save Xmas and Energy Best Deal presentations organised through Citizens Advice are not taking place in Scotland. CA is organised separately in Scotland and Save Xmas was originally rolled out here by the Office of Fair Trading. Please note that there is funding available for regional events in 2009 and we will ensure resources are distributed fairly so activists in Scotland or members need not be excluded from receiving this information especially as we are making use of multiple channels.

## Regional Events

As part of the build up to our Centenary Year in 2010, many readers will know that we are not organising a national seminar in 2009 (although there will still be an AGM) and instead have invited regions to put on their own events.



The Board of Trustees previously gave a commitment to provide some funding to help with the cost of organising these activities and we have now written to every region with details on how to apply.


The closing date for completed applications is 16 March 2009 (although we do ask regions not to wait until the deadline to submit their bid especially if you know what you want to do!).

East Midlands and Eastern regions have already teamed up to organise an event on 3-4 April taking place at the Old Barn Hotel, Marston, nr Grantham.

### CHECKLIST

- Should you have any queries or wish to discuss any aspect of your event including the availability of speakers please get in touch with Julie Grant, [j.grant@unison.co.uk](mailto:j.grant@unison.co.uk)
- East Midlands and Eastern regions have organised an event on 3-4 April. Please contact your branch or [l.bailey@unison.co.uk](mailto:l.bailey@unison.co.uk) for further details.
- We will still be holding an Annual General Meeting in 2009 on 7 May. More details to come.

## New Benevolence Today initiative



UNISON Welfare, together with 29 other grant making charities, set up Benevolence Today campaign to promote the work of benevolence


charities to members of the public and third party agencies.

Can you help us to promote this initiative aimed at other agencies to encourage referrals? There is a new information pack aimed at third party organisations and you can download the pack and find out more about the

campaign at [www.benevolence today.org](http://www.benevolence.today.org). Benevolence Today have also teamed up with Turn2Us to promote their search engine to use to locate charities helping individuals in need.

You can access the facility through Benevolence Today's website or visit [www.turntous.org.uk](http://www.turntous.org.uk)

## Criteria for financial assistance



Thank you to everyone who completed and returned our online survey. This is informing our review of the criteria for financial assistance which we use as a basis for deciding on what

level of financial assistance to give. This year's review has been lent special significance because of the impact of the global financial crisis. You can still feed back to us any suggestions or thoughts you have on the criteria especially through your link trustee.

### CHECKLIST

- You can download a copy of the current criteria for financial assistance from the documents folder on the welfare pages on the UNISON website [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)