

Julie Addresses Scottish Council

UNISON Welfare is a unique confidential service for members and their families Julie Grant, Head of Welfare told Scottish branches on 9 April. Last year it supported 1,000 members through its debt advice service, paid £0.5 million in grants and financed 260 holidays with almost double that in convalescence provision.

The fund relies on fundraising by members in addition to the grants from UNISON. "Welfare is very alive in Scotland and I am very grateful to Branch Welfare Officers and the Scottish Welfare Committee for their work", Julie told delegates. She outlined new Welfare strategies including email bulletins and a revamped website along with other services.

Our money advice service is free and includes advocacy and bankruptcy support. Julie highlighted the new legal position in Scotland. "The new debt arrangement scheme in Scotland means agencies acting for people can legally require creditors to come to repayment arrangements. The first of these was taken last week", she said.



The reality

Turning to the 'Bucket and Spade' appeal, Julie said, "25% of the population can't afford to get away on holiday. We want to extend our holiday service to include applying for grants". These holidays will all be in the UK. That's why the appeal is aiming to raise £150,000 and is well on the way there. Julie turned to the reality of the help Welfare can give to members. After a girl alleged sexual

abuse by her father, her mother fled with her to new accommodation. They had no belongings and no money.

"Welfare provided money for settling in, to get the child to school and for furniture as well as advice and assistance with debt. We are now about to send mother and daughter on holiday", explained Julie. As well as helping members, research shows that UNISON's Welfare Fund is also a great recruitment tool.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Setting the Scene for 2005

The Scottish Welfare Committee held its annual training seminar at the Stirling Highland Hotel Stirling from Saturday 29th January to Sunday 30th January 2005.

30 new and existing Branch Welfare Officer's supported the event.

Eleanor Haggett opened the event on the Saturday morning with a brief welcome and introduction section. The main theme for Saturday was Dealing with Debt Recovery. Martin Barr from MB Debt Counselling was the tutor for this session. Martin split this topic into three sessions:

- Money Advice
- Debt Collection
- Sequestration and trust deeds



The Sunday morning session was split into two topics. Anne Roberts presented the Role of the Branch Welfare Officer; UNISON Welfare Trustee for Scotland and Eleanor Haggett presented the Setting the Scene for 2005 session. It is the intention of the Scottish Welfare Committee to organise a series of one-day training seminars for new BWOs. The first of these will take place on Saturday 21st May 2005, at UNISON House 14 West Campbell Street Glasgow. For further details or to register contact Kevin O'Neil on 0870 7777 006 or k.oneil@unison.co.uk

Scottish Welfare Committee 2005/06

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Andy Douglas: (Stirling Council)

Shirley Buchanan: (City of Glasgow)

Yvonne Craig: (East Lothian)

Ally Mitchell: (Lothian Health)

Graham Beattie: (Dundee City)

June Day: (East Dunbartonshire)

Michael Scroggie: (Aberdeen City)

Charles Ross: (North Lanarkshire)



Walk the Loch

Congratulations to the 63 participants who took part in our first annual sponsored walk. On Sunday 10th April 2005, these hardy souls walked the 14 miles around Loch Katrine to raise funds for the Bucket and Spade Appeal.

The Scottish Welfare Committee would like to thank everyone who assisted in the organisation of this event.



Branches can still donate to this worthwhile cause. Contact Eleanor Haggett or Kevin O'Neil Information Development Officer for more details.



Unison Welfare National Seminar and AGM 2005

(A report by Eleanor Haggett)

Thirty-three Scottish delegates registered for the above Seminar, which was held in York from 29 April – 1 May 2005. As current Chair of the Scottish Regional Welfare Committee it gave me great pleasure to note such a positive turn out. As ever this Seminar was oversubscribed and unfortunately a number of Welfare Officers were unable to attend. I believe its popularity is due to the fact that only at this get together do the majority of Welfare Officers feel supported and able to receive valuable training which is vital to the role of a Welfare Officer. You may be aware that our Region has offered structured and meaningful training for its activists however not all regions are able to offer this type of support.

The workshops on offer were varied and included:

- 'Get On Board' (Role of the Trustee),
- 'We Need You' Welfare Officer Role,
- UNISON Rule Book Benefits,
- Home Improvement Agencies,
- 'Family Holidays', 'Knowing Your Boundaries', 'How To Influence', 'Bereavement', 'The Changing Face of Debt', 'Domestic Abuse' and 'Get On The Case' case work process. As you can see a lot to offer and learn.

Our delegation shared a Regional Delegate grouping with our colleagues from Northern Ireland who identified the very real problems they were experiencing in their attempt to revitalise UNISON Welfare in Northern Ireland. As you can imagine we gave assurances that we would try to give help and assistance where possible.

At the Plenary Session all Regional Chairs were required to provide a Report Back Session. On behalf of the Scottish Region I reported that we recognised the changing role of the Scottish Welfare Committee which included:

- Reporting to Scottish Council and Welfare AGM
- Monitoring activity and promoting best practice
- Supporting branches
- Assisting recruitment and retention of Branch Welfare Officers
- Training and Briefing
- Promoting fundraising initiatives
- Raising awareness and communication
- Campaigning and policy development

Therefore our development plan for 2005/6 includes:

- Training for new BWOs and update session for others
- Strengthening Branch Welfare organisation by mapping current activity
- Preparing a BWO toolkit and formalising a buddy system with new and experienced BWOs
- Improve communication through a branch bulletin and Scottish Council reports
- Monitor and actively engage in Scottish Parliamentary activity on welfare issues such as debt recovery, credit unions and fuel poverty.

As you can see an ambitious work plan that will require a great deal of hard work.

Finally, I am sure I speak on behalf of all the delegates, who attended the dinner and social Evening in saying that we thoroughly enjoyed our evening. As ever it was great to catch up with all our Welfare Officers throughout Scotland. Once again my sincere thanks to them as they do a really great job of work and are often heroes/ heroines of our union.

I do hope to meet you all again either at our Day Seminar in May or at our weekend event in October 2005.

This bulletin is produced by UNISON Scottish Welfare Committee. For further details contact Kevin O'Neil, Information Development Officer, UNISON House, 14 West Campbell Street, Glasgow G2 6RX. Tel. 0870 7777 006 k.oneil@unison.co.uk